# THE SETTLERS IN THE CENTRAL HILL COUNTRY OF PALESTINE DURING IRON AGE I (ca 1200-1000 BCE): WHERE DID THEY COME FROM AND WHY DID THEY MOVE?

by

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# SUMMARY

This dissertation deals with the religious practices of the settlers in the central highlands of Palestine, during the pre-monarchic period (ca 1200-1000 BCE; the so-called 'period of the Judges'), as revealed by archaeology (cultic artifacts and sites, as well as burial customs and practices). The religious practices of the settlers have been shown to reflect continuity with, and were practically indistinguishable from, those of the Late Bronze Canaanite cult, suggesting that the majority of the settlers were originally Canaanites, most probably from the coastal city-states (ie, the religious practices have been used as an 'ethnic marker'). It has also been proposed that one of the motivating factors for the migration of people from the coastal region to the central highlands was a fairly dramatic climatic shift, one which resulted in the area becoming increasingly and significantly drier from the late 13$^{th}$ century BCE until about 900 BCE.



**KEYWORDS**

Judges; Palestine; Canaanite; highland settlers; religious practices; cultic artifacts; cultic sites; burial customs; climatic fluctuations.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

This study is an attempt to answer the question: *where* did the settlers in the central hill country of Palestine during Iron Age I (ca 1200-1000 BCE) come from and *why* did they move? With regard to the first part of the question, the religious practices of the settlers will be used as an 'ethnic marker.' With regard to the second part, an attempt will be made to determine whether the fairly dramatic climate shift, which began in the late 13$^{th}$ century BCE and which lasted until about 900 BCE was, at least partly, responsible for this move. Before commencing, it is worthwhile to provide some background regarding religion, in general, in the ancient Near East, as well as the effect of climatic fluctuations on human history.

### 1.1.1 Religion in the ancient Near East

Religion is absolutely *fundamental* to all societies, both ancient and modern, and humanity has always had the need to believe. As Karen Armstrong (1994:3) has stated: '... human beings are spiritual animals. Indeed there is a case for arguing that *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo religiosus*.' The search for the scientific roots of religious faith is a current and hotly debated issue. According to Michael Brunton (2006:47), the molecular biologist Dean Hamer (in his 2004 book, *The God gene*) has claimed to have located one of the genes he says is responsible for spirituality. More recently, the philosopher and evolutionary theorist Daniel Dennett provoked further controversy with *Breaking the spell: religion as a natural phenomenon* (2006) in which he cast religion in terms of memes - cultural ideas that can spread, mutate and survive in our minds, whether or not they are good for us. Then there is *The God delusion* (2006) by Richard Dawkins. And, now (since 2008) scientists in Switzerland have been searching for the Higgs boson, the so-called 'God particle,' using the Large Hadron Collider, a new particle accelerator.

Today, most view the gods as part of a metaphysical world, entered only by speculation or revelation. To the ancients, however, the gods, although a distant presence, were part of the real world and the acknowledgement of their existence apparently required no faith (Van der Toorn 1995:2043). No distinction between the meaning of a phenomenon and its explanation was made and the gods were considered to be present in all the phenomena of the world, whether ordinary or extraordinary. They were, nevertheless, not simply personifications of natural phenomena; their bodies resembled those of humans (although much larger and they sometimes had special attributes, such as an extra pair of eyes) and they possessed human characteristics, being capable of feelings, thoughts and had wills of their own (ie, they were anthropomorphic, both externally and internally). They are sometimes described as having the characteristics of a king (basilomorphous), with the local pantheons being depicted as a divine council or court. Although part of the world, the gods were not completely encapsulated by it; rather, they inhabited such distant places as a faraway mountain recess or the horizon where heaven meets earth. Both Ba'al, the patron of Ugarit, and Yahweh, the god of Israel were believed to have dwelled in mountainous areas: Ba'al had his mythological palace on Mount Saphon; Yahweh was believed to have come from the mountains of southeast Palestine (Van der Toorn 1995:2044).

The pinnacle of the hierarchy of the universe was occupied by the gods, with the ordinary people dependant upon them for health, offspring, plentiful harvests, success in battle, and protection from the capriciousness of nature. The aim of worship was to come into contact with them - to please (or, at least, not provoke to anger) and honour, and to appease them if necessary, otherwise humans would be left to the mercy of circumstance (Van der Toorn 1995:2044).

### 1.1.2 The effect of climate fluctuations on human history

The concept that climate fluctuations play a role in controlling human history (and on their religious beliefs) may initially seem a little far-fetched. However, the following should make it clear that climate fluctuations do, in fact, play a role - one which, unfortunately, has often been ignored. One of the most dramatic examples which can be used to illustrate its role is the transition from foraging to farming in the Levant, a transition which has been described

by Harris (1996a:ix) as 'the most fateful change in the human career' and which occurred at the beginning of the Holocene, about 10 000 years ago. This 'agricultural revolution' enabled a reduction in the range of wild foods exploited, facilitated long-term sedentary settlement, the maintenance of larger and more complex groups, and led ultimately (in some parts of the world) to the emergence of urban civilization. It is interesting to note that Southwest Asia (ie, the geographical region between the eastern Mediterranean and the Indus valley and between the Black and Caspian Seas and southern Arabia) is considered to be 'the earliest centre of extensive plant and animal domestication in the world' (Garrard, Colledge & Martin 1996:204).

The driving factors that led to this transition were sedentism, a theory first proposed by Carl Sauer in 1952 (Harris 1996b:555) and for which there is now a considerable body of archaeological evidence, and climatic fluctuations (perhaps, the most important stress factor?). The eastern Mediterranean experienced a cold dry interval coinciding with the Younger Dryas in Europe, around 9500 - 8600 bce (uncalibrated radiocarbon time; see 1.2.5). In Palestine, this would, no doubt, have affected the wild plant-food resources available to the semi-sedentary Late Natufian population, increasing their dependence on small scale agriculture, in particular the cultivation of the large-seeded grasses which became the progenitors of domesticated cereals. This was followed by a period of climatic amelioration during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA; ca 8300 - 7500 bce), when, for the first time, cereals showing morphological evidence of domestication appeared in the Levant. The rapid return of wet conditions would have produced many small lakes and ponds ensuring crop success (Garrard *et al* 1996:207-208,220; Harris 1996b:555). The three principal cereal crops (Zohary 1996:143) from Neolithic sites in Southwest Asia are emmer wheat (*Triticum turgidum* subsp *dicoccum*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and einkorn wheat (*Tritcum monococcum*). At Jericho, levels dated to 7300 - 6500 bce show the earliest postulated evidence for domestic einkorn wheat, while there is some evidence for domestic barley, dating from about 8000 to 7800 bce, at Gilgal and Netiv Hagdud in the Jordan Valley (Garrard *et al* 1996:207). Domestication of these cereals during the PPNB (ca 7500 - 6500 bce) was accompanied - either simultaneously, or a short time later - by the cultivation of several companion plants, the most common being lentils, peas, flax and, although less frequently, bitter vetch and chick-pea (Zohary 1996:143).

Several later climatic shifts have been shown to coincide with major breaks in the cultural evolution of the Near East. The cultural blossoming of the whole region during the Early Bronze Age (3200-2400 BCE) occurred during a humid phase, characterised by a continuously high Dead Sea level, while the dry period around 2200 BCE, coincided with the cultural collapse that is well documented for the entire Middle East (eg, the breakdown of the Akkadian civilization in Mesopotamia); this was followed about 300 years later by another rise in the Dead Sea level which coincided with the founding of the Middle Bronze Canaanite city-states, such as Hazor, Gezer and Megiddo (Migowski *et al* 2006:427; see 5.2.2, for the role of the Dead Sea as a 'rain gauge'). It has recently been suggested by Orland *et al* (2008), based on the high-resolution geochemical analysis of a stalagmite from Soreq Cave, located in the Stalactite Cave Nature Reserve near Jerusalem, that even the decline of the Roman and Byzantine empires in the Eastern Mediterranean may have been driven by the increasingly dry weather from 100 CE to 700 CE, with steep drops in precipitation around 100 CE and 400 CE. Other climate fluctuations affecting the history of Palestine are highlighted below (in Chapter 5).

Not all scholars are, however, convinced that climate fluctuations were of primary significance in the rise and fall of Near Eastern civilizations. Marfoe (1979:10), for example, is of the opinion that 'the almost cyclical regularity of the patterns strongly suggests a complex process of socioeconomic change that cannot be explained by such facile postulations as climatic changes or "barbarian" migrations.'

It should be pointed out that it is hardly necessary to look to the past in order to appreciate the effects of climatic shifts. At present, the world is going through another cycle of 'global warming' (a natural cycle which this time, unfortunately, is being exacerbated by human activity) and, already, its effects - particularly on flora and fauna - are obvious. Records from 26 weather stations across South Africa have shown that, since 1960, the country has warmed by about $0.5^0$C with an increasing number of warmer days/year while, in parts of the Western Cape (which seems to be more susceptible to climatic warming than the rest of South Africa), a 1-$2^0$C increase in minimum temperature has been recorded over the past four decades (Joubert 2007:55-56). The Southeaster has increased in speed by between 1 to 3km/hour (predominantly in the winter and along the coast). The atmospheric concentration of $CO_2$ is now higher than it has been in the past 430 000 years, having increased by more than 30%

since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. This increase in greenhouse gases (emissions from cars, factories and agriculture; agriculture and other related land uses account for about one third of all greenhouse gases emitted by human activities (Weiss 2007:25)) has been linked by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to the 60 - 70% mortality rate of quiver trees (*Aloe dichotoma*) in the Richtersveld (Joubert 2007:52-53). Phoebe Barnard (2008:52), the co-ordinator of the SANBI's Birds and Environmental Change Partnership, has pointed out that, in theory, the hotter, drier and windier weather that the Western Cape is already experiencing 'should force plants or animals in two directions - upwards [uphill towards cooler mountain tops] and polewards to cooler climates.' Although some birds (eg, karoo and even savanna birds) have already shifted range southwards and westwards there is, unfortunately, very little land between us and the South Pole and endemic high-altitude birds (eg, the Cape Rockjumper/*Chaetops frenatus*) are already halfway up the mountain sides. Mountain tops are, obviously, smaller than mountain bases (ie, fewer birds can fit). Sea-level rise is expected to have a very negative effect on rocky coastline birds (eg, the African Black Oystercatcher/*Haemotopus moquini*). A recent sea-level rise risk assessment by Laquar Consultants has concluded that the flooding of Cape Town by 2.5m waves (cf those which tore into Ballito in KwaZulu-Natal in 2007) is almost a certainty (95% chance) within the next 25 years, while there is an 80% chance of flooding by waves as high as 4.5m. The first scenario would flood a coastal strip of about 25km$^2$ and the latter, 61km$^2$ (Donaldson 2008:4). Obviously, the effects would be far more catastrophic than merely 'upsetting' a few birds!

The higher temperatures expected in the future, as well as the anticipated increases in sea levels (causing salt seepage into the ground water) will have a disproportionately devastating effect on agriculture, particularly in the earth's lower latitudes, where most of the world's poor live. For example, India and several African countries (eg, Sudan and Senegal) are expected to experience a 40% and a more than 50%, respectively, decline in agricultural productivity by the 2080s. Weiss (2007:25) sees our next biggest challenge as creating crops that resist global warming, using genetic engineering to transfer specific traits from more resilient species. Alex Perry, in his new book *Falling off the edge* (2008), has shown that climate fluctuations are also behind some of the world's nastiest conflicts (eg, that in modern Darfur).

It is thus quite clear that climate fluctuations do play a significant role in human history - a role which is definitely worth exploring. Canaanite religious practices were intrinsically related to nature and fertility. In my opinion, a notably warmer and an increasingly and significantly drier climate, in the ancient Near East during the early Iron Age, would thus have favoured the retention of these practices by the hill country settlers of Palestine.

## 1.2 DEFINITIONS, NOMENCLATURE AND ABBREVIATIONS

### 1.2.1 The term 'Palestine'

It is acknowledged that during Iron Age I, the use of the term 'Palestine,' which derives from 'Philistine,' to describe the small piece of territory - scarcely more than 400km long and 80km wide and which is now divided between modern-day Israelis and Palestinians - may be questioned. The Philistines are first mentioned (in the form *peleset*, used as a gentilic) during the reign of Ramesses III (ca 1182-1151 BCE), as one of the invading Sea Peoples from the Aegean, or possibly, coastal Anatolia (Dothan 1982:1; Thompson 1999:80). There is little evidence that the local inhabitants would have understood themselves to be Palestinians and it would seem that only foreigners referred to the area as 'Palestine' (Lemche 1997:152). The term has, nevertheless, been in common usage since Neo-Assyrian times and is well attested in classical sources, first and foremost in the *History* of Herodotus (6$^{th}$ century BCE). During the Assyrian period, the name (in the form *Palashtu*) occurs in cuneiform texts and refers to a geographic region covering most of southern Palestine (Thompson 1999:80). To Herodotus, it was simply the southern Syrian region which lies between the Phoenician cities and Egypt (Lemche 1997:153). In the absence of a more appropriate term, and for the sake of convenience, 'Palestine' will thus be used in this discussion.

### 1.2.2 'Israelites' or 'settlers'?

Distinctions between ethnic groups at the beginning of the settlement process appear to have been rather vague and it would seem that people who had considered themselves to be Hivites, Jebusites, Gibeonites or Kenizzites, amongst others, in the early 12$^{th}$ century BCE,

joined the new and growing entity. The Hebrew Bible makes it clear that the Gibeonites, for example, 'were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites' (2 Sm 21:2). Many sites have been identified by scholars as 'Israelite.' Finkelstein (1988:27-28) is of the opinion that the formation of the Israelite identity - a long and complex process - was not completed until the beginning of the Monarchy. For the purposes of this discussion, the term 'Israelite' will be used simply to denote the hill country people who were in the initial process of sedentarization during Iron I, whether or not they had described themselves as Israelites at that stage. It is acknowledged, however, that the use of the term 'Israelite' in a 12th century context may be somewhat ambiguous, since many different groups may, in fact, have settled in the hill country. At this stage, unfortunately, archaeological evidence is unable to distinguish these sub-groups from the Israelites, since the material culture found at sites such as Giloh, Bethel, Tell el-Ful, Shiloh and Mt. Ebal is almost identical to that from Jerusalem (also known as Jebus (eg, Jos 18:27), 'the city of the Jebusites' (eg, Jdg 19:11)) and Gibeon (Mazar 1990a:95). In other words, excavations have shown no variants which may be attributed to either the Jebusites or the Gibeonites. Thus, in this discussion, the term simply refers to those whose descendants ultimately became Israelites with the establishment of the Israelite Monarchy. A broad definition such as this, however, 'leaves sufficient room for different opinions as to the origins of this population and the degree of its homogeneity' (Mazar 1990a:96). Although the term 'Israelite' (as defined above) will be used at times, the more appropriate term and most frequently used one for the purposes of this discussion is, however, 'settlers.'

### 1.2.3 Religion

The definition of 'religion,' for the purposes of this discussion, is the one used by Dever (1983:572), who sees it as 'a set of beliefs concerning the supernatural nature of the universe and the moral nature of man, usually institutionalized and expressed in ritual observance,' while the terms 'cult' and 'cultic' are viewed in terms of the definition used by the editors of *Civilizations of the ancient Near East* (Sasson (ed in chief) 1995:1858) and 'refer to the system of religious acts of worship in all their facets, including prayers, processions, sacrifice, adoration of divine images, gestures, and genuflections, whether or not such rituals are

accomplished in sacred spaces (temples, shrines, or the like).'

### 1.2.4 'Tribes' (*shevet/matteh)* or 'clans' (*mishpahot*)?

Many scholars are convinced that the tribes were formed as early as the 13th century BCE (eg, Freedman and Miano 2006); others (eg, Albertz (1994:251 n 26), feel that 'the wider group organization of the tribe ... was very unstable in the period before the state and only became consolidated from the 11th century on under the increasing military pressure from outside, especially from the Philistines.' In his view, only the two lowest levels of the social organisational structure, 'the exogamous family (*bet 'av*) and the endogamous clan (*mishpahah*) are real here,' whilst 'the genealogy at the two wider levels of the tribe (*shevet*, *matteh*) and of the tribal alliance of "Israel" is largely fictitious' (Albertz 1994:73). The individual could only expect solidarity from, and could be requested to render support to, the family and clan. The membership of a tribe was much looser; a family/clan would have become part of a tribe only in times of crisis, when political action was unavoidable (eg, Jdg 8:1ff; 15:10ff). In addition, membership was voluntary and which tribe one joined depended on circumstances (Albertz 1994:73-74).

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'tribe' as 'a group of (especially primitive) families or communities, linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, and usually having a common culture and dialect, and a recognized leader; any similar natural or political division; each of the 12 divisions of the Israelites.' No mention is made, however, of how many members are required to reach 'tribehood.' A 'clan' is 'a group of people with a common ancestor; a large family as a social group; a group with a strong common interest.' Gottwald (1979:339) has defined a tribe 'as an autonomous association of segmented extended families (*bet 'avot*) grouped in village/neighbourhood protective associations (*mishpahot*), averaging about 50 per tribe, functionally interlocking through intermarriage, practices of mutual aid, common worship, and a levy of troops.'

According to the Hebrew Bible, a league of 12 tribes came into being in the pre-monarchic period. How early this occurred, however, remains unclear. Using the oldest poems in the Hebrew Bible (the Song of Deborah (Jdg 5) and the Song of the Sea (Ex 15)), as well as Genesis 49 and the Merneptah Stele, Freedman and Miano (2006:300) have come to the

conclusion that 'a pre-Mosaic patriarchal Israelite league of 12 tribes formed some time in the early 13th century BCE.' In their view, Genesis 49 is 'a commemorative hymn that recounts Israel's side of the story with regard to Merneptah's punitive invasion of Canaan in 1207 BCE' (2006:298). Since they acknowledge that the northern and southern leagues probably formed separately, they do not suggest 'that the 12 tribes all came together at the same time.' They are also of the opinion that, irrespective of the origins of the tribes, each tribe had 'a separate history and that some of them, or at least their ancestors, were certainly in Canaan in the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age' (2006:301).

The Song of Deborah (Jdg 5; a poem that is dated by most scholars to the pre-monarchic period; Freedman has, for example, dated it to the mid-late 12th century BCE; Freedman & Miano 2006:296) describes a major victory by the Israelites over the Canaanites, near Ta'anach (significant parts of Ta'anach are known to have been destroyed about 1125 BCE; Glock 1993:1432). Judges 5:14-18 describes the mustering of 10 tribes for battle; some are said to have participated, others did not, but are nevertheless listed. The names of the tribes of Simeon, Levi and Judah are, however, omitted and only 10 tribes are shown to be united under the name of 'Israel.' According to Freedman and Miano (2006:296), 'it is methodologically more reliable to suppose that the list reflects the reality in the 12th century BCE,' although they acknowledge that it is possible that lines and names have been dropped from the poem leaving only a 'torso.' They see 'a distinctive correlation between the name of Israel and the 10 northern tribes.' The formation of 'Israel' by the northern group of 10 tribes during the time of David (1 Ki 11:26-39, especially vv 30-32 and 35-36) was simply 'a restoration, rather than an innovation' and they see the fact that Ishbaal became the king of Israel only (2 Sm 2:8-9), after Saul's death, while David became king of Judah at Hebron (2 Sm 2:1-4; cf 19:41-44) as confirmation.

Freedman and Miano (2006:296-297) have accounted for the 'missing tribes' in Judges 5, by means of the Song of the Sea (Ex 15), which is also considered by many to have an early date (eg, Cross 1973:121-144; Halpern 1983:32-40) and reflects events concerning the southern tribes in the 12th century BCE. It is often presumed that the southern tribes of Simeon and Judah were 'missing' because they were separated from the north during the 12th century by a series of fortified Canaanite cities, which thus precluded them from joining in the battle (Freedman & Miano 2006:296). They place the *terminus ante quem* (the finishing-point of

this period) somewhere between 1150 and 1100 BCE, around the time of the Battle of Kishon celebrated in the Song of Deborah; the reference to Philstisa (Ex 15:14) provides the *terminus post quem* (the starting-point of this period). In other words, this encounter would have to have occurred after the event described in Merneptah's Stele. While Freedman and Miano (2006:297) 'would agree that there was a confederation of political units in the land of Canaan collectively called "Israel" during the 13th and 12th centuries,' they are more likely 'to equate them with the tribes mentioned in the Song of Deborah.' The Blessing of Moses (Dt 33), which appears to be dated to the late 12th or early 11th centuries 'suggests that the 12-tribe league mentioned therein was formed after the unification of two distinct elements, one from the south and the other from the north' (Freedman & Miano 2006:298).

Further, since the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Levi are the only tribes mentioned in Exodus 6:13-27, these tribes may, in fact, have been the only ones involved in the captivity and the Exodus (Freedman & Miano 2006:300). Thus, in the discussion which follows, the term 'tribe,' and not 'clan,' will be used.

### 1.2.5 'BCE'/'bce'/'CE'/'ce' and 'm bmsl'

One of the problems encountered was that of how to express dates. Archaeologists have difficulty thinking in terms other than of BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (the Common Era) or AD (*Anno Domini*, 'in the year of the Lord'), which all refer to calibrated radiocarbon dates and calendric dates. Climate study scientists, on the other hand, are accustomed to using either BP (before the present (era), taking 1950 as the present, in accordance with the decision of the 9th Radiocarbon Congress held in 1976; Harding 1982a:vii) or bce and ce (or ad) for uncalibrated radiocarbon dates. 'Calibrated' (ie, calendric, historical) dates have been adjusted for variations in levels of atmospheric Carbon-14. Calibration curves are revised periodically as data are continuously generated from dendrochronologically-dated tree-ring samples and absolute dates after calibration depend on the calibration formula used. In addition, the 'calibrated' date may have a standard deviation of anything between 20 years (for high- precision dating) to 100-150 years (Singer-Avitz 2009:28). In the following discussion, both BCE/CE and bce/ce will be used, where appropriate, for calibrated (calendric/historical) and uncalibrated radiocarbon dates,

respectively.

The term ‘m bmsl’ is the abbreviation for ‘metres below mean sea level.’

## 1.3 HYPOTHESIS

The discussion which follows is based on the following two-part hypothesis:

(1) that the majority of the settlers in the central highlands of Palestine, during the pre-monarchic period (ca 1200-1000 BCE), originated from the Canaanite lowland city-states and that their religious practices, as revealed by archaeology (cultic artifacts and sites, as well as their ideas concerning death and the afterlife, including funeral rites), reflected continuity with, and were practically indistinguishable from, those of the Late Bronze Canaanite cult; in other words, the religious practices will be used here as an ‘ethnic marker,’ to indicate the origin of the majority of these settlers; and

(2) that the reason for this substantial movement of people to the higher areas, as well as for the persistence of Canaanite religion, especially that of the fertility cult, was a fairly dramatic climate shift throughout the ancient Near East - one which resulted in the area becoming increasingly and significantly drier.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ‘epic history’ of Monarchic Israel and its formative period from the earliest emergence of the Israelites in Canaan (the 12$^{th}$ century BCE) is contained primarily in what is called the ‘Deuteronomistic history’ (Dtr), a composite work, stretching from Deuteronomy through Samuel and Kings (Dever: 2001:100-101). The composition of its core is generally attributed (eg, Van der Toorn 1994:35; Dever 2001:100; 2003:8) to a group of religious reformers from the days of Josiah (ca 640-609) in the late 7$^{th}$ century BCE. After that there is, however, no consensus: some see it as a unified work of the pre-exilic period, while others (and I include myself, here) see a pre-exilic core (Dtr1), much edited and supplemented by post-exilic writers in the Persian period (Dtr2). More radical scholars (eg, Thomas L Thompson 1999:xv) date the entire work, unified or not, to as late as the Hellenistic period.

This 'history' portrays at least two versions of early Israelite religion: that of the Deuteronomistic editors who shaped the final version; and the one which can be reconstructed by reading 'between the lines' in the Hebrew Bible's denunciation of popular 'pagan' cults. The 'official' portrait is highly idealistic and reflects to a large degree the view of the elite, orthodox, nationalistic sects and parties that produced it (Dever 2001:270). They see polytheism as a lapse from an original, pure Mosaic monotheism; however, their condemnation of 'pagan' beliefs and rites simultaneously confirms their widespread existence. In other words, the religion depicted in the Hebrew Bible is what *should/ought* to have been believed by the Israelites and it was produced relatively late in Israel's history. Folk/cult religion - my main focus - on the other hand, was most probably the *real* religion of the Israelites (ie, what the majority of people in fact believed and practised, whether mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or not; Dever 2001:270).

Most studies on Israelite religion tend to ignore the rich archaeological data available today. For example, Mark Smith (2002a:17), openly admits that his work: 'concentrates more on literary data than on archaeological information.' Dever (1990; 2005), on the other hand, has a more balanced approach.

Texts (biblical, as well as extra-biblical) and artifacts (archaeological data) must both be considered 'primary data' and, for them to serve as sources for history, they must be 'interpreted separately and similarly, and then compared.' In other words, a *dialogue* between these sources is necessary (Dever 2001:79). Of course, the revisionists (eg, Philip Davies, Thomas Thompson, Keith Whitelam, etc) would query the use of biblical texts as a legitimate source for history-writing, since they view the Hebrew Bible as little more than 'pious fiction.' Thompson sees biblical Israel as 'a theological and literary creation' and one that 'stands in sharp contrast to the Israel that we know from ancient texts and archaeological field work' (1999:78). As Daniel Hillel (2006) has observed, however, '... those who deny any historical basis for a biblical account simply because they have no evidence to support it may themselves be ignoring the fundamental scientific principle that the absence of proof does not in itself constitute proof of absence' (ie, the absence of archaeological evidence for a particular event does not means that the event never occurred).

Archaeology is a powerful tool for isolating the 'historical core' of events in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, despite its theocratic nature. This 'core' can be isolated by singling out

certain events where the textual and archaeological data (viewed independently) happen to 'converge'. The historian observes these where they occur and then attempts to ask what they mean in terms of evaluating the available sources for history-writing. In addition, the historian should look not only at 'convergences', but also at 'divergences', since the biblical account cannot be taken at face value as historical. Whilst the best possibility for history lies in 'convergences' and the 'balance of probability', the 'divergences' may be as instructive as the 'convergences.' The Hebrew Bible is an elitist, idealistic document, which all but ignores the religious practices of the majority in ancient Israel. Archaeology, on the other hand, possesses a unique potential for revealing these religious practices (ie, what the majority actually *did*, rather than what they *should* have done). This information is varied, abundant, and less deliberately edited than texts (ie, it is more objective, in some ways; Dever 2001:173-174).

Another 'tool' used here is climate studies, a field of study which has its own interdisciplinary methodology. Although the reconstruction of the past record of climate does not aim to explain human history, it has a pay-off in terms of the new light which this subject can shed on the 'chronology of famines and also, perhaps, of epidemics' (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:295). The interdisciplinary methods used involve an examination of the textual evidence for references to drought and famine; these references are then compared to the archaeological and paleoclimatic evidence applicable to the region.

### 1.4.1 The structure of the dissertation

Using both textual material (the Hebrew Bible, as well as other relevant texts such as the Ugaritic texts, the Amarna letters and the Ramesside texts) and archaeological evidence, this study will commence (*Chapter 2*) with the historical background to the situation in Palestine during Iron Age I, from the 'Exodus - Sinai' tradition and the 'Conquest' of Canaan, and will include the models which have been proposed, as to how the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land. Whether or not it is possible to identify a new ethnic entity in the archaeological record of the hill country of Palestine and to learn the origin(s) of this entity will then be explored. As Susan Niditch (1997:3) has pointed out, 'the phrase "religion of ancient Israel" ... has two equally challenging components: the meaning of religion and the

identity of the ancient Israelites.'

In *Chapter 3*, it will be proposed that the majority of the Iron I settlers were, in fact, drawn from the indigenous population of Canaan. A consideration of what is known about the territory, culture, society and, in particular, the religious beliefs and practices, including burial customs, of the Canaanites will follow. Here use will be made of what is known from archaeological remains of cultic sites and artifacts, tombs, mortuary installations and burial deposits, as well as appropriate textual material, especially the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible. In addition, the persistence of Canaanite religion, even as late as the Common Era, will be examined.

Excavated cultic sites in the highlands of Palestine during Iron Age I will then (*Chapter 4*) be compared with several of those from the United Monarchy ($10^{th}$ century BCE), in order to show the changes which occurred over time with respect to architecture, cultic artifacts and choice of location. The features of early Israelite religion which show cultural continuity with Late Bronze Canaanite religion will be illuminated, as will any unique differences. Burial customs, tombs and burial deposits will also be examined and these practices will be compared to those of the Canaanites.

In *Chapter 5*, it will be proposed that the majority of settlers came from the lowlands of Canaan and that this substantial movement of people, a movement which would have been associated with a shift from an urban to a rural lifestyle was due, at least in part, to a climatic shift which resulted in Palestine, as well as much of the Near East, becoming significantly warmer and drier. Use will be made of nontextual (eg, proxy data such as pollen from five areas of the Near East, Persian Gulf sediments, barley harvest dates and an analysis of anomalies in the radiocarbon record), textual (eg, the Ugaritic texts, Akkadian texts and Mesopotamian written documentation) and other relevant paleoclimatic evidence (in particular, Dead Sea levels) for the warming of the Near East (ca 1200 - 900 BCE). In addition, the benefits of this move will be spelled out. Long-term climatic fluctuations are not, in general, historically documented and 'tend to go unnoticed, being beyond the temporal perspective of an individual observer' and, in any event, ancient humans took more interest in the more frequent or dramatic events (eg, river floods and recessions or earthquakes), which have a more immediate significance to society (Frumkin & Elitzur 2002:334). Fortunately, modern scientific methods for the study of climate have come to our rescue and applicable

methods and their results will be highlighted. Since the Canaanite religious practices were intrinsically related to nature, a notably warmer and an increasingly and significantly drier climate would have favoured the retention of these practices - the settlers were, after all, a marginal-zone society with an agriculturally-based economy.

### 1.4.2 Sources

The primary textual sources used for this study are the Hebrew Bible (the RSV) and extra-biblical sources such as the Ugaritic, Akkadian and Mesopotamian texts (in translation). A comprehensive list of references dealing with archaeological evidence for the climatic conditions and the religious practices of the settlers in the highlands of Palestine, during the early Iron Age, is to be found in the Bibliography. Use has also been made of the electronic media, where applicable. It is acknowledged that contemporary sources - whether literary or archaeological - are less than adequate for a description of Israelite popular religion during the 'period of the Judges' (Patai 1965:37-38). For all its inadequacies, the Hebrew Bible, nevertheless, remains the primary literary source.[1] As mentioned above, most of the texts dealing with pre-monarchic Israel, although based on ancient oral tradition, were subjected to relatively late rewriting and editorial revisions concerning popular religion appear to have been especially thorough: some references that were judged to be particularly offensive, were no doubt abridged and, perhaps, some were even excised. Although not strictly speaking contemporary, there are, however, some incidental references regarding popular religion. Fortunately, the rich archaeological and mythological evidence from neighbouring areas such as Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt and, especially, Canaan and which contains an abundance of detailed information concerning the same deities who according to the Hebrew Bible were worshipped by the 'idolatrous' Israelites, can be used to supplement the information gleaned from the Hebrew Bible (Patai 1965:38). Archaeological evidence (eg,

1 Not all scholars consider the Hebrew Bible to be a primary source. Niehr (1997:159), for example, sees it as a secondary source. A secondary source has been defined by Ahlström (1993; cited by Niehr) as 'a copy of an original, an interpretive text, a rewriting, re-editing, distortion, falsification or the like' and, since the Hebrew Bible is 'presented from a Judahistic, Jerusalemite point of view' and reflects a specific ideology (Ahlström 1991:117), it falls into the category of secondary sources; Niehr (1997:165) does, however, concede that this raises the question as to whether the biblical texts 'contain older material, [eg, annals, folk tales].'

religious structures and artifacts, and inscribed tablets, monuments, statues, etc) with clear evidence of the nature of popular early Israelite religion is also rather scarce. Those sanctuaries, high places and other religious structures that are thought to have belonged to the Israelite settlement period, do not, in general, conclusively identify the deity being worshipped, nor the worshippers as either Israelites or non-Israelites. Archaeology is able to contribute to an understanding of early Israelite religion that texts cannot. It is the best 'tool' for looking at popular religion, since it is able to supply the general cultural background against which Israelite religion can be realistically portrayed. The evidence obtained, which often differs radically from the biblical texts, also provides some valuable clues as to how to 'read between the lines;' the *condemnation* of religious practices in these texts actually contains some unwitting descriptions of 'unofficial' practices. The archaeological evidence - although not exactly abundant - when coupled with the texts in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel is, nevertheless, able to illustrate some of the basic features of the pre-monarchic Iron Age syncretistic cult. It is worth noting that there are several narratives portraying popular religion - whether approved or not - in the book of Judges.

Although climate studies as a field of scientific study, with its own interdisciplinary methodology, has only come into its own relatively recently, it is being increasingly recognised that a sensitive relationship exists between society and environment and that the physical environment, including the role of climate fluctuations, does have an important influence on the history of a given region.

# CHAPTER 2

## FROM THE 'EXODUS' TO THE 'PERIOD OF THE JUDGES:'

## POLITICAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Before exploring the origins of the settlers in the central hill country of Palestine during Iron Age I (ca 1200-1000 BCE) and whether a climatic shift was, at least partially, responsible for the change in settlement patterns during this period, it is worthwhile considering (using both textual material and archaeological evidence) the historical background to the situation, from the 'Exodus - Sinai' tradition and the 'Conquest' of Canaan. The models which have been proposed, as to how the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land, will also be included. Whether or not it is possible to identify a new ethnic entity in the archaeological record of the hill country of Palestine and to learn the origin(s) of this entity will then be explored.

### 2.1 THE INTERNATIONAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION AT THE TIME

The history of Canaan, for 400 years from the mid - 16$^{th}$ century BCE, was largely interrelated with, and dictated by, Egyptian activity in Asia and the reactions of Egypt's northern enemies (Mazar 1990b:232). The Canaanite city-states (and the other inhabitants of Canaan) were dominated and exploited by Egypt during this period. Although their culture deteriorated as a result, the Canaanites nevertheless played an important role in the international cultural sphere during the Late Bronze Age: Canaan had cultural, political, and trade relations with her northern and southern neighbours, as well as with Cyprus (Alashiya) and the Mycenaeans of Greece.

The end of the Late Bronze Age (between the end of the 13$^{th}$ and the beginning of the 12$^{th}$ centuries BCE) coincides with the beginning of the so-called 'Dark Age': a period of population movements and social dislocations, which is generally believed to have resulted in

a long disruption of trade in the eastern Mediterranean[2] (Sherratt 2003:40). During the Late Bronze - Iron IA transition, the Hittite empire collapsed, Egyptian political and military power in Asia declined and the ethnic makeup and material culture of Canaan underwent significant changes. The Canaanite city-state system was replaced by an ethnopolitical structure, in which different peoples coexisted in the various regions of the country. In addition to the remnants of the indigenous Canaanite population, Canaan saw the arrival and settlement of the Israelites in the hill country and the appearance of the Sea Peoples, mainly Philistines, on the coast. With none of the great powers strong enough to impose its authority on the region, control remained in the hands of the area's inhabitants for several hundred years (Mazar 1990b:295).

## 2.2 THE 'EXODUS - SINAI' TRADITION AND THE 'CONQUEST' OF TRANSJORDAN

### 2.2.1 Background

Archaeological finds and historical texts from the earliest recorded times have verified that, during times of drought, famine or warfare, Egypt was viewed by the people of Canaan as a place of refuge (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:52-53). Rainfall - or the lack thereof - had a profound effect on the agriculturally-based economy of Canaan. Canaan has a Mediterranean climate (ie, it is a winter rainfall area) and the amount of precipitation tends to fluctuate from year to year. Agriculture in Egypt, on the other hand, depended on water from the Nile River, rather than local precipitation. Even when the river levels were low, due to fluctuations in

2 It has been suggested, however, that this disruption should not be overstated and that the use of the expression 'Dark Age' ought to be revised. For example, Susan Sherratt (2003:40), argues that: '... interregional maritime trade, far from grinding to a halt at the end of the 13th century, continued into the 12th century, although the extent and nature of this trade and the way in which it operated had undergone a radical change.' The archaeological evidence from Dor provided by Ephraim Stern (1993:331-332), clearly points to an existing sea trade between Cyprus and the east Mediterranean coast in the mid-11th century and to the fact that the 'Dark Age' in Palestine must have been quite short. Stern limits the period of absence of trade to about 1150-1050 BCE. It is possible, however, that the commercial links between Palestine and Cyprus in the mid-11th century are evidence of internal trade, that is: '... between the Phoenician inhabitants of Dor and those of Cyprus, which was being intensively settled by the Phoenicians at this period' (Stern 2000:104).

rainfall patterns at its sources in central Africa and the Ethiopian highlands, the Nile remained a reliable source of water for irrigation. Moreover, being a well-organised state, Egypt was better prepared for poor crop yields as it stored grain in government storehouses. In times of famine, immigrants from Canaan settled in the fertile eastern delta area. Although the Nile now only splits into two main branches just north of Cairo, ancient sources confirm that there were historically several additional branches. Two maps from the Roman-Byzantine period, for example, confirm that during that period, there were seven branches, creating a significant increase in well-watered land (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:53).

Large communities of Semites from southern Canaan are also known to have settled in the delta area during the Bronze Age for a number of other reasons. The Beni Hasan tomb painting from Middle Egypt (19th century BCE) depicts a group, presumably traders, from Transjordan travelling to Egypt with animals and goods (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:54). Other Canaanites domiciled in the delta, who were used in the construction of public works, are known to have been conscripted as landless labourers or were prisoners of war; some of these prisoners were assigned as slaves and used to cultivate temple estates. A few of these are known to have become soldiers, government officials or priests (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:54).

### 2.2.2 The 'Exodus'

The establishment of the Israelites as a nation in the Land of Canaan commences with the biblical account of the Exodus from Egypt. The time frame for the Exodus (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:57; Dever 2003:8-9) has now been confirmed as the mid - to late - 13th century BCE and the biblical 'Pharaoh' (if historical) was, presumably, Ramesses II of the 19th Dynasty (ca 1279-1212 BCE, on the low chronology). The pharaoh of the Exodus, who succeeded the pharaoh of the oppression (Ex 2:23) and who apparently drowns during the Exodus (Ex 14:6-8,10,27-30), would then have been Merneptah, Ramesses' son. The Hebrew Bible locates the Hebrews in Egypt's northeastern delta: the 'land of Rameses [sic]' (Gn 47:11) and the 'land of Goshen' (Gn 45:10; 47:4,6; Ex 8:22; 9:26). However, no definitive archaeological evidence for the Exodus has ever been found, nor is there any Egyptian text

from this period containing a reference to either 'Hebrews' or 'Israelites,' other than the mention of 'Israel' on Merneptah's 'Victory Stele' (see 2.4.1). It is, of course, quite likely that the Egyptians would not have admitted, much less advertised, a defeat. In addition, the hundreds of archaeological sites on the delta have received comparatively little attention, when compared to the sites from Cairo down to Aswan; the high water tables make excavating to early levels both difficult and expensive (Hoffmeier 2007:32).

According to Exodus 1:11, the Hebrews (who by that time had been resident aliens in Egypt for a considerable period of time) were enslaved in order to construct the Pharaoh's 'store cities, Pithom and Raamses.' The best candidates for 'Pithom,' however, do not fit the required historical circumstances in the mid - 13th century and its location remains a matter of controversy (Dever 2003:14). 'Raamses' has been conclusively identified with Avaris,[3] the old Hyksos capital (at Tell ed-Dab'a) and, although the site shows evidence of an Egyptian destruction (ca 1530 BCE) followed by a long period of abandonment before its re-founding as the royal city of 'Raamses' (or 'Pi-Ramesses;' 'the house of Ramesses'), no actual remains of slave camps from the time of Ramesses II have been found (Dever 2003:15). The site could, nevertheless, have been used by the Israelite ancestors for making mud-bricks for his construction projects (Ex 5:5-21). Although most of the biblical ten plagues are typical 'natural disasters' common in the Middle East, Dever (2003:16,20) feels that the final plague (the death of all Egyptian firstborn males; Ex 12:29-32) and the crossing of the 'Red' (Reed) Sea and then the Sinai are deliberately miraculous; archaeological data can illuminate the historical context of the biblical narratives, not prove or disprove miracles.

In a parallel to the biblical immigration of Canaanites to Egypt and their violent return to Canaan, Avaris was sacked by Pharaoh Ahmose (18th Dynasty), according to an Egyptian source (16th century BCE), and he pursued the remnants of the Hyksos to their main southern Canaanite citadel, Sharuhen, near Gaza, which he then besieged and later stormed (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:55-56). Egyptian control over the movement of immigrants from Canaan into the delta was then tightened by the construction of a line of forts along its eastern border

3 Edgar Pusch and his colleagues, who have been excavating at Qantir since 1980, now believe it (and not its nearby sister site, Avaris) to be the 'Pi-Ramesses' built by Israelite slaves (Hoffmeier 2007:32-33).

and the entire length of the Ways of Horus (the international road from Egypt to Canaan; Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:60), complete with granaries and wells, spaced at a day's march from each other. A common name for these forts in the New Kingdom, was Migdol (cf Ex 14:2). No doubt, should a large group of Israelites fleeing from the delta have passed through this closely-controlled line of forts, then somewhere in the abundant Egyptian sources from the New Kingdom there should have been some reference to Israelites (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:59-60). These forts and wells are depicted as a relief in the form of an early map on a wall in the temple of Amun at Karnak, dating to the era of Ramesses II's father, Pharaoh Seti I (ca 1300 BCE). Remains of these forts in the northern Sinai, in areas closely corresponding to those in the Karnak relief, were excavated by Eliezer Oren (in the 1970s; cited by Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:60-61). Each comprised a strong, Egyptian military-type, brick fort, with storage facilities and a water reservoir.

### 2.2.3 'Wandering in the wilderness'

Of the dozens of sites listed in the various 'stages' of the 'wandering in the wilderness' (Nm 33), only a few have ever been persuasively identified: Migdol (Nm 33:7), where an Egyptian fortress which was only occupied in the 7$^{th}$ - 6$^{th}$ centuries BCE was found; Kadesh-barnea (Nm 33:36-37; Dt 1:9-46), where a small Egyptian fortress with several phases dating to the 10$^{th}$ - 7$^{th}$ centuries BCE was discovered; and Ezion-geber (Nm 33:35), which has impressive Late Iron Age remains - there are, however, no Late Bronze remains at any of these sites. There is also doubt as to whether so many sites ever existed in the Sinai (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:63; Dever 2003:19). Even if the number of wandering Israelites according to the Hebrew Bible ('about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children;' Ex 12:37) is wildly exaggerated, Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:62-63) are of the opinion that some traces of material remains should be apparent. After all, using modern archaeological techniques, the Sinai has revealed evidence of pastoral activity as early as the 3$^{rd}$ millennium BCE and as late as the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods; there is as yet, however, no evidence - not even a sherd nor a trace of an ancient encampment - from the 13$^{th}$ century BCE.

### 2.2.4 The 'conquest' of the Negev and Transjordan (Nm 20-36)

As far as the conquest of Transjordan is concerned, Nelson Glueck (on the basis of his regional surveys, which began in the 1930s) reconstructed an occupational gap in Transjordan during most of the Middle and the Late Bronze Ages, followed by a rise in occupation during Iron I - II (Glueck, in Sauer 1986:1). He correlated this evidence with biblical sources and used this gap to support a late date (13th century BCE) for the Exodus-Conquest. Although Canaanite culture had flourished in Palestine during the Late Bronze Age, he argued that most of Transjordan had remained nomadic or semi-nomadic. It was only during the 13th century that Transjordan began to be resettled, with Iron Age sites reflecting the early Israelites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. It is now known that Transjordan was not largely semi-nomadic in the Late Bronze Age and that a system of city-states much like that found in Palestine existed, primarily in northern and central Transjordan (Sauer 1986:8). Recent surveys and excavations have, however, shown beyond a reasonable doubt that there are no Late Bronze Age sites nor signs of destructions anywhere in southern Transjordan (in agreement with Glueck), with one exception: the site of Tell el-'Umeiri (on the southern outskirts of modern Amman). This heavily fortified town was most probably destroyed in the early - mid 12th century; the Canaanite town of 'Umeiri is, however, not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Dever 2003:35).

We are told (Nm 21:1-3) that the people of Israel destroyed all the Canaanite cities in the Negev and changed 'the name of the place' to 'Hormah' (Hebrew: 'destruction'). It is now known (Aharoni 1976:71) that there were no fortified Late Bronze Age cities whatsoever in the Negev (eg, Hormah (Tel Masos) and Arad; Nm 21:1; 33:40; Jos 12:14). In the eastern Negev, for example, Aharoni and his colleagues (1976:59) have confirmed that Tel Malhata and Tel Masos remained unsettled after the destruction of the fortified 'Hyksos' enclosures, during the 'Hyksos' expulsion and the founding of the New Kingdom in Egypt (ca 1570 BCE), until the 'arrival' of the settlers in the 13th to 12th centuries BCE (Aharoni 1976:59). Tel Arad was then founded on an extension of the southeastern spur of the Early Bronze Age city, while the first settlement at Tel Beersheba dates to Iron I and that at Tel 'Ira to the period of the Israelite Monarchy. All the early settlements were destroyed towards the end of the 11th

century. Some were never rebuilt (eg, Tel Masos, which was only reestablished on a nearby hill (Khirbet el-Meshash) at the beginning of the 7th century, at the earliest (Aharoni 1976:60-62,68-69)). Thus, it would appear that there were no cities for 'the people of Israel' to have destroyed (Nm 21:3).

According to the biblical tradition (as described in the Book of Numbers), the Transjordanian kingdoms of Ammon and Moab antedated the penetration of the Israelite tribes into the Mishor ('the Plain') and Gilead; their establishment was, however, contemporaneous with the rise of the Israelite Monarchy (Na'aman 1994:223). The kingdom of Edom emerged even later and did not achieve any kind of statehood until the 7th century BCE. In other words, there apparently was no king of Edom to deny access to the Israelites (Nm 20:14-21). Dever (2003:28-29) thus concludes that the 'Exodus-Sinai' tradition cannot be corroborated as factual history and that the Book of Numbers seems to reflect the conditions of the 8th - 7th century BCE, rather than those of an earlier time period. For example, the more famous Migdol, as well as Pithom, were built during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, during the reign of Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE) and his son Necho II (610-595 BCE) - a period which was characterised by a number of ambitious public projects throughout the eastern delta (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:66). In addition, all the main places mentioned in Numbers 33 were inhabited at that time and, in some cases, only during the 7th century BCE. Amongst the many other 7th century parallels to the biblical immigration of Canaanites to Egypt and their return to Canaan, Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:67) have pointed out that even some of the names mentioned in the Joseph story, for example, Potiphar (Gn 39:1), Potiphera, Zaphenath-paneah and Asenath (Gn 41:45), although in use during earlier periods, became more common in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE.

### 2.2.5 The biblical account: history or myth?

It is generally acknowledged that most of the books of the Hebrew Bible were written long after the events they purport to describe, by composite writers and editors with a definite theological and ideological agenda; the process was both lengthy and exceedingly complex. The question, therefore, arises: should the 'Exodus-Sinai' tradition as related in the Hebrew Bible - and especially since there is no real archaeological evidence - be accepted at face

value (as it was by scholars such as Albright, Wright and Bright in the mid - 20th century), or was it 'invented' by Jews at a later date as Whitelam (1996:71-121), for example, would have us believe? In other words, is the biblical literature nothing more than pious fiction? While it is unlikely that the 'Exodus' occurred on the scale presented in the Hebrew Bible, the 'Exodus-Sinai' tradition, as well as the earlier Israelite tradition of the descent of Israel (Jacob) into Egypt in a time of famine, reflect a clear knowledge of conditions in Egypt and may, in fact, preserve some historical memories. This suggests that at least some of the ancestors of the Israelites must have spent a reasonably long sojourn in Egypt.

The sojourn of the Hyksos in Egypt is worth exploring in order to shed some light on this 'history.' The Hyksos, a Semitic people from Asia who were remembered by the Egyptians as 'shepherd-kings' (cf the portrayal of the Israelites as 'shepherds' in Gn 46:32; 47:3), settled in the eastern delta in the area of Avaris (just north of Goshen) as early as the mid - 18th century BCE and ultimately ruled Egypt for two dynasties. Halpern sees the Joseph story as 'a reinterpretation of the Hyksos period from an Israelite perspective' (1992:98) and he cites 'two groups of data to support the view that the Israelite nexus has some historicity to it' (1992:99). Firstly, the name 'Jacob' appears on several scarabs as the name of at least one Hyksos king. One such scarab (dated to the 18th century BCE), bearing the name *Y'qb-HR*, the transliteration of the Amorite/Canaanite name 'Yaqub' (Jacob), was discovered in a tomb at Tel Cabri, near Haifa. This Jacob, thought to have been a Canaanite king, may have been an ancestor of another Jacob, a Hyksos king who ruled Egypt about a century later. Since the Hebrew Bible describes all Israelites as having descended from the Jacob who travelled from Canaan to Egypt, Halpern (1992:99) finds 'the connection between the eponym, Jacob, and the forgotten name of the Hyksos king, in the context, [to be] a tantalizing one' (my insertion). Secondly, the names of the patriarchs in Genesis (eg, Isaac, Ishmael, Israel, Joseph and, especially, Jacob) are of a type that was probably derived from the Hyksos era (MB II-III; ca 1800-1550 BCE). While names of this type are relatively rare after the Middle Bronze Age, they are common in Israelite ancestral lore (Halpern 1992:99). Thus, it is quite possible that at least some of the people who ultimately became Israelites were descendants of the Hyksos.

There are also several 'convergences' between the biblical and extra-biblical texts and iconography. The Amarna letters tell us that townsmen in Canaan sold their families to Egypt

in exchange for grain, whenever warfare or drought forced them to do so (Halpern 1992:91). Egyptian texts, from the 2nd millennium BCE, reveal that Semitic peoples from western Asia (cf Gn 43:1-15) regularly entered Egypt to water and pasture their flocks, especially in times of drought (Hoffmeier 2007:33). Papyrus Anastasi VI, for example, from the reign of Merneptah (ca 1212-1202 BCE) reports that 'the Shasu of Edom' were permitted to 'pass the fortress Merneptah-hotep-hir-maat ... which is in Tjeku' (Succoth; Ex 12:37; Nm 33:5) so that they could water their flocks 'at the pools of Pi-Atum' (Hoffmeier 2007:34).

According to Exodus (1:14), two kinds of labour were imposed on the Israelites: 'hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field.' Tomb paintings and textual evidence from New Kingdom Egypt (eg, the painting from the tomb of Rekhmire, mayor of Thebes and vizier of Thutmosis III (ca 1479-1425 BCE), as well as its accompanying text) support the use of prisoners of war from military campaigns in Canaan-Syria and Nubia for the purposes of brick-making (Hoffmeier 2007:34-35). Ramesside texts make it clear that quotas were set by Egyptian officials (eg, a leather scroll, now in the Louvre and dating to the fifth regnal year of Ramesses II (ca 1274 BCE), records brick-making teams, targets, shortfalls and even records a lack of straw for brick-making (cf Ex 5:5-19); straw, although used in the making of bricks in Egypt, was not a typical ingredient of mud-bricks in Canaan; Halpern 1992:100). Foreigners (mostly prisoners of war) are depicted in New Kingdom (ca 1540-1200 BCE) tomb reliefs herding cattle, performing various types of field work, as well as working in vineyards and making wine. In other words, almost every detail in the biblical tradition reflects conditions in New Kingdom Egypt. Hoffmeier (2007:35) is of the opinion, that if the biblical tradition was fiction/myth, one would have expected the authors of the Hebrew Bible to have offered 'a more glorious picture of their own origins.'

Another question which arises, is the number of people who are said to have 'journeyed from Rameses [sic] to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children,' as well as 'the mixed multitude' which accompanied them (Ex 12:37-38). While it is highly unlikely that the escape from Egypt could have involved such large numbers, or that such a large company could have survived in the Sinai or the Negev for any length of time thereafter, it is quite possible that more modest numbers could have left Egypt down the Wadi Tumilat. There are reports of runaway slaves escaping via this route. Papyrus Anastasi V, for example, reports that the day after leaving the capital, 'Ramses,' an official pursuing two

runaway slaves in the late 13th century BCE arrived at 'the enclosure-wall of Tjeku,' the fortress at the end of the Wadi Tumilat. The two slaves are reported to have then continued by a southern route into the eastern desert (Halpern 1992:105).

Ze'ev Meshel (2008:34-39) has recently demonstrated striking parallels between the biblical account of the Israelites' post-Exodus sojourn in the desert and the age-old practices of the modern Sinai Bedouin. Many of the events described in the Hebrew Bible 'have a realistic background in the natural conditions of the Sinai and reflect a nomadic way of life that exists to this day' (2008:39). The total absence of archaeological evidence for the biblical stories may be explained by the fact that such a way of life does not leave many traces; nevertheless, ethnographic evidence (see 2.4) would tend to support the theory that at least some of the people who later became Israelites did, in fact, wander in the wilderness. For example, he has pointed out that the festivities surrounding *Zu'ara* ('visit' or 'pilgrimage'), the annual Bedouin pilgrimage to the wilderness tombs of their tribal sheikhs, has much in common with the 'feast' to the Lord in the wilderness used to enable the Israelites to escape from Egypt (Ex 5:1). In October, thousands of quails (cf Ex 16:13) reach the beaches of northern Sinai where they are captured by the Bedouin using nets. They also build booths (cf Lv 23:39-43) out of palm trees in which they live for a few weeks at the end of summer and beginning of autumn, when they gather at the oases. The customs surrounding *Rabi'ah,* which takes place during the spring when the flocks are taken into the mountains for seasonal pasture, may contain hints of the origins of the Passover. After sacrificing a goat/lamb, the blood is drained and smeared on their camels and on their children's foreheads, as protection (cf Ex 12:3-10, where the Israelites were commanded to smear the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the lintels and doorposts as protection from the tenth plague of death). Even *matzah*, the unleavened bread eaten at Passover (Ex 12:17) has a parallel in Bedouin life (*libeh*).

All these 'convergences' would seem to indicate that at least some (perhaps only a small minority) of the ancestors of the Israelites spent a lengthy period in Egypt and then wandered in the desert, perhaps after escaping from slavery. Why, then, did the tradition of such a relatively small number of people become the dominant biblical tradition? Dever (2003:229-231) has suggested that it is highly likely that, among the principal editors of the biblical tradition, there were members of the so-called 'House of Joseph' (ie, the central-southern tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and, probably, Benjamin), whose ancestors may have 'come out

of Egypt to Canaan, and in a way that upon reflection seemed miraculous to them' (2003:231). The southern groups are known to have shaped the literary traditions of the Hebrew Bible; even the language used largely reflects the southern (Judahite) dialect of classical Hebrew. Although a minority, their story eventually came to be told as though it had been true for 'all Israel.' Early Israel was a confederation of peoples and it was only much later that literary tradition made it all-inclusive. Although cultural unity is implied in the biblical narrative, this probably only developed long after the 12th century BCE. The unifying factor may have been Yahwism; this, however, cannot be traced archaeologically.

Not only were contemporary geographical and other details integrated into the Exodus saga during the 7th century, it would appear that so were contemporary political realities relating to Josiah's religious ideology and territorial ambitions. It is 'neither historical truth nor literary fiction,' but rather 'a powerful expression of memory and hope born in a world in the midst of change' (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:70-71).

## 2.3 MODELS FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF EARLY ISRAEL

This section will include the three 'classic models' for the settlement of early Israel, as well as a selection of the newer syntheses.

The Hebrew Bible provides us with two rather different accounts of how the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land. When two versions of a text exist - one longer than the other - it is more likely that the shorter text is the earlier one (McCarter 1992:121). The account in Joshua portrays a lightning military campaign, in which 'Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings' (Jos 10:40); the land was then allotted among the Israelite tribes. In Judges, the account begins with the allotment after which an attempt is made to take possession of the land by conquest. This attempt, however, would appear to be the work of individual tribes or groups of related tribes and not that of a united 'all Israel,' as is the case in Joshua. In addition, Judges 1 makes it clear that most of the tribes were unable to succeed fully in driving out the local inhabitants from their allotted territories (the two exceptions being the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) and lists twenty cities where the inhabitants were not driven out. This list includes some of the most important cities in the land (eg, Jerusalem, Beth-shan, Ta'anach,

Megiddo, Gezer and Beth-shemesh; Jdg 1:21,27-29,33).

Modern scholars generally agree that the account of the conquest of Canaan in Judges is more authentic, historically reliable, and likely to be more ancient than the one portrayed in Joshua. Baruch Halpern (1983), for example, assigns it to the original Deuteronomistic History.[4] The three 'classic models' for the settlement of early Israel all differ in every aspect with respect to two major questions: what was the origin of the new inhabitants of the Iron IA highland villages; and how was the settlement process accomplished?

### 2.3.1 The 'conquest' model

The oldest model for the emergence of the Israelites in Canaan is that of WF Albright (proposed in the 1920s and defended by him until his death in 1971) and his followers (eg, G Ernest Wright (in 1957, in *Biblical archaeology*), Yigael Yadin (from the evidence obtained from his excavations at Hazor in 1955-58) and John Bright (in 1959, in *A history of Israel*)). It is drawn from the book of Joshua and sees the process as a total and rapid *military conquest* by the chosen people from outside the country (Dever 2003:41-44). The Late Bronze Age Canaanite city-states were annihilated and the Israelites built their own sedentary settlements on the ruins. Up until the 1960s, archaeological evidence from such sites as Hazor (Jos 11:10-

4 McCarter (1992:120-2) has offered a literary objection to this common assertion. The Greek version of Joshua-Judges in the earliest form of the Septuagint lacks Judges 1 and, presumably, it was inserted into the Greek by a later Greek translator. Since it is unlikely that the earlier translator would have removed Judges 1 from the text (ancient scribes were inclined to be inclusive), he must have worked from a Hebrew text that did not contain it. Judges 1 presumably, at some stage, existed as an independent document either as an ancient document that was added at a late date to the biblical text or, perhaps, it is simply a later document. McCarter suggests that, from a text-critical point of view and, despite the fact that it corresponds to a certain extent with archaeological evidence, Judges 1 is irrelevant to the discussion of the early Iron Age, since it seems to be at least a half a millennium too late. The fact that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were the only tribes successful in driving out the people from their assigned territories, suggests that these tribal territories contained the most consistent and least mixed Israelite population. During the post-exilic history there was an extended period of time when most of the land of Israel apart from Judah and Benjamin had been lost to the government in Jerusalem. In addition, post-exilic literature touches on the reforms of Nehemiah (see Neh 13) which include the attempt to purify the Israelite population by rejecting, amongst others, foreign marriages. McCarter (1992:122) thus suggests that Judges 1 may have been composed during the post-exilic period and that, by depicting the territories of Judah and Benjamin as those with the most uniform population of Israelites, it 'supports the agenda of Nehemiah's reform and the contemporary suspicion concerning "the people of the land" with whom the Jewish repatriates from Babylon quarrelled (see Ezra 4:4, etc).'

11) and Lachish (Jos 10:31-33) seemed to corroborate that some sort of military campaign by foreign invaders had occurred in the late 13th to early 12th centuries, resulting in the violent destruction of the sophisticated Late Bronze culture. It should be noted, however, that it is quite possible that the destruction of some or all of these cities was caused by the Egyptians and/or the Canaanites (either by internecine strife between Canaanite cities or by open revolt within cities), and *not* by the Israelites (Gottwald 1979:200). Some of the other sites specifically said *not* to have been conquered by Joshua have, on excavation, shown no signs of destruction during this period. Unfortified and architecturally simple settlements were found to have been built on some of the totally destroyed sites, while other settlements were located on previously unoccupied sites or places where there had been a long break in occupation during the Late Bronze Age.

It is now known, however, that some of the most important sites mentioned in the biblical narrative, such as Jericho and 'Ai, were not inhabited at all during the Late Bronze Age. Jericho (Jos 2-6) was destroyed around 1500 BCE, during the Egyptian campaigns to expel the Asiatic Hyksos, and lay abandoned during the mid - late 13th century; while 'Ai (Jos 7-8) appears to have been deserted from about 1500 BCE until the early 12th century BCE (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:81-82; Dever 2003:45-47). Several other sites previously thought to have corroborated the biblical account have been reinterpreted in light of new evidence. Tell Beit Mirsim was thought by Albright to be biblical Debir (Jos 10:38-39); Khirbet Rabud, about 11km to the southeast and which shows no destruction on the 13th - 12th century BCE horizon, is now considered to be the site of Debir (Dever 2003:49). In addition, Late Bronze culture was not destroyed in one catastrophic event, but in a long and gradual process. The kings of Hazor, Aphek, Lachish, and Megiddo all appear in a list of 'the kings of the land whom Joshua and the people of Israel defeated on the west side of the Jordan' (Jos 12:7-24). However, the destruction of these cities took place over a time span of more than a century. 'No single military force did it, and certainly not in one military campaign' (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:90). Furthermore, the origins of the settlers outside the region have, as yet, not been located (Finkelstein 1995:363).

### 2.3.2 The 'peaceful infiltration' model

This model, proposed by Albrecht Alt (1925), and supported by scholars such as Martin Noth (1960) has two elements: the Genesis tradition of the ancestors of Israel as nomadic tent-dwelling shepherds; and ethnographic studies of the sedentarization of their modern counterparts, the Bedouin of the Middle East (Dever 2003:50). It stresses both 'the environmental continuities between Israelites and other presumably semi-nomadic peoples and between Israelites and Canaanites' (Gottwald 1979:208), as well as the length of the process (from the patriarchal to the Davidic era). According to this model, the settlers were originally nomadic tribes from the semi-arid regions of Transjordan. Some of those who made the annual trek across the Jordan into the sparsely populated hill country in search of pasture and water, remained there longer and longer each season, eventually settling in the fertile hill country which was cooler and had a better water supply. Unfortunately, nomadic peoples tend to leave few traces and there is almost no archaeological evidence to support such movements (Dever 1992:29). Although the overall emphasis is on *peaceful infiltration*, there is allowance for military conflict when the Israelites had later become sufficiently numerous to form a threat to the Canaanite inhabitants in the better locations of the fertile valleys and in the plains (Gottwald 1979:208), perhaps as reflected in Judges.

This appealing theory, however, seems to have several flaws: it depends on a rather outdated, 'romanticised' view of the Bedouin lifestyle (Bedouin do not voluntarily infiltrate or settle and, even if forced to do so by adverse conditions, will attempt to return to their nomadic life as soon as possible); biblical stories of tribal origins are now generally believed to be largely fictitious (Dever 2003:51-52); and the 'inner' deserts of the southern Levant could not have been the place of origin of the Iron I population since, prior to the domestication of the camel (at the earliest, late - 2nd millennium[5]), these areas were very sparsely settled. Nor can these nomadic tribes be traced to other parts of the ancient Near East (Finkelstein 1995:363). In

5 According to Kohler-Rollefson (1996:284), *Camelus dromedarius*, the one-humped camel or dromedary, appears to have been domesticated in the Arabian peninsula and that its dispersal 'began at the end of the second millennium BCE with the emergence of the Midianites' from that area (1996:282). While we know very little about the initial stages of domestication, 'it is clear that when the camel first appeared in the Levant it was a fully domesticated animal with attendant pastoral populations' (1996:287).

addition, as Luke (1965, cited by Chaney 1983:42) has pointed out, 'the evolutionary flow was from the cultivated areas of the Near East "toward the steppe and desert, not out of the desert to the sown."'

### 2.3.3 The 'peasant revolt' model

One of the earliest Israelite settlements, 'Izbet Sartah (possibly biblical Ebenezer; 1 Sm 7:12; established at the end of the 13th century or the beginning of the 12th century BCE), is located near Aphek on the western edge of the Canaanite hill country overlooking the coastal plain (Finkelstein1988:19,238). If the new settlers had entered Canaan from the east, whether by conquest or through peaceful infiltration, the question arises as to why one of their earliest settlements was so far west. Surely, this should have been the last area to be settled? An additional weak point with respect to the 'conquest' and 'peaceful infiltration' models is the ambiguous evidence presented by the four-room houses and collared-rim jars. The four-room house was, until recently, considered to be an 'Israelite' house-type (Shiloh 1970:180) and it was thought to be a key clue to dating the emergence of the Israelites. Pillared buildings, of which the four-room house is a sub-type, are now known from the coastal plain (Tel Sera' and Tell Qasile and, more recently, Tel Harasim, Tell Lachish and Tel Batash), Phoenicia (Tell Keisan), as well as from sites east of the Jordan, such as Sahab, Khirbet el-Medeiyineh, Khirbet Abu Banna and Khirbet Mashmil (Mazar 1994:83, n 42; Sauer 1986:10; Rainey 2008a:49). In other words, these houses should not be linked to the ethnic background of a community; their popularity in the hill country should rather be linked to environmental and social factors (Stager 1985a:17). Collared-rim jars were once thought to be an indicator of 'Israelite' sites. As early as 1922, Albright (after his excavations at Tell el-Ful) recognised that these jars were characteristic of Iron I sites in the central hill country; he did not, however, claim that they were exclusive to 'Israelite' sites. In 1970 Aharoni, on the other hand, considered his discovery of collared-rim jars in Stratum VI at Megiddo to be proof of Israelite habitation (Finkelstein 1988:31,284). These jars have subsequently been found in lowland sites, such as Tel Nami on the coast and Megiddo (Finkelstein 1996:204). They are also abundant in every Iron I site in the Transjordan plateau, the best known examples being Sahab

and Tell el-'Umeiri, near Amman. The significant number of collared-rim jars found at Megiddo nullifies London's hypothesis (1989) that they are found primarily in rural (as opposed to urban) communities. Again, these jars do not necessarily reflect ethnicity; their dominance in the hill country should rather be attributed to economic, environmental and social factors and they reflect the needs of anyone - Israelite or Canaanite - living in the hill country. This has led some scholars to advance a third model: *the peasant revolt model*.

This model, pioneered by George Mendenhall in 1962 (1962:65-87) and developed and expanded by Norman Gottwald (1979:191-233), dismisses the previous two models as flawed and views the settlement as a clash of classes (ie, in terms of a 'Marxist' *social revolution*) which brought down the existing stratified, unjust system, favouring a better life with equal opportunities. Rather than a lightning military conquest, the process was a slow internal revolution, mounted by indigenous Canaanite peasants who revolted against their corrupt, urban overlords at the end of the Late Bronze Age. While Mendenhall (1962:73) saw the settlement as being religiously motivated, Gottwald (1979:660-663), in keeping with his Marxist orientation, saw the reason for the split from the Late Bronze Age urban centres and the relocation to the hill country as being socioeconomic, rather than theological. In his opinion (Gottwald 1985:35): 'The overwhelmingly attested immediate point of origin of the Israelites was in Canaan proper.' The settlers eventually formed a new ethnic entity and society. This innovative model of indigenous origins for the early Israelites rests on ideological assumptions which, however, are difficult to test archaeologically. In addition, coastal Canaanite sites such as Acco, Tell Keisan, Jokneam, Tel Qiri, as well as Megiddo, all reflect a continuity of occupation from the 13$^{th}$ to the 11$^{th}$ centuries BCE (Dever 2003:212) and show no evidence of a *peasant revolt* (Rainey 2008a:50). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that 'the history of agrarian societies is replete with peasant rebellions' (Chaney 1983:61; see also Coote & Whitelam 1987:57,59).

### 2.3.4 More recent models

New developments in archaeology have shown the necessity for a re-evaluation of all three

approaches. This has produced a plethora of syntheses and variations, with no clear consensus among scholars. Some consider the Hebrew Bible to be worthless as a source for the history of pre-monarchical Israel, and look rather to sociology and anthropology and, to some extent, archaeology. Thompson (1999:78), for example, views biblical Israel as nothing more than 'a theological and literary fiction,' while Whitelam (1996:23) is of the opinion that: 'The picture of Israel's past as presented in much of the Hebrew Bible is a fiction, a fabrication like most pictures of the past constructed by ancient [and, we might add, modern] societies.' Others feel that there must have been military aspects to Israel's emergence in Canaan and that this must be part of any synthesis (Shanks 1992a:13). It is impractical to mention all of these syntheses and variations and thus this discussion will be confined to those of Fritz, Finkelstein and Dever.

*2.3.4.1 The 'symbiosis' model*

Volkmar Fritz (1981:61-73), a German scholar who co-directed the excavations at Tel Masos, near Beersheba (Khirbet el-Meshash; possibly biblical Hormah (Hebrew for 'destruction;' Nm 21:1-3); it has also been identified with Ba'alat-beer (Jos 19:8), Amalek (a non-Israelite city), Bethel-of-the-Negev (1 Sm 30:27) and Ziklag (1 Sm 27:6)), developed a distinctive version of previous indigenous origins models (eg, the 'peasant revolt' model) based on the evidence obtained. His model is often referred to as the 'symbiosis' model, although he himself did not explicitly refer to it as such until 1987 (1987:98). While he noted elements of continuity with Late Bronze Age Canaanite culture (eg, in pottery and metalworking, and even in the pillar-courtyard houses which he considered to be derived from earlier local courtyard houses, with possibly some being influenced by the Egyptian private house (1981:68-69)), the Iron I adaptation of house-form and pottery at Tel Masos and elsewhere, as well as the newly-sedentarized lifestyle, indicated to him that the Canaanite and Israelite peoples probably had the same origins and that they had continued to live alongside one another from the 13$^{th}$ century BCE, or possibly even earlier (initially as semi-nomads) - thus, the notion of *symbiosis* (Fritz 1981:69-70). This type of symbiosis is characteristic of 'culture-land nomads' who, unlike the nomadic Bedouin, spend lengthy sedentary periods in their

search for pastures and develop close contacts with neighbouring towns. Such a partly sedentary life would have led to 'an economic, and probably a political, symbiosis and adoption of cultural goods' (Fritz 1987:98). Culture-land nomads are known from all ages, especially in Mesopotamia and, to support his symbiosis hypothesis, Fritz (1987:99) has used three texts 'whose historical accuracy withstands critical examination:' the Merneptah Stele (see 2.4.1), the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 and the list of 'unconquered cities' in Judges 1.

In his view, there was neither a 'conquest' (there are no LBA sites in this part of Palestine), nor a 'social revolution' (the house types and construction methods show that 'the settlers were a unit that did not form a group within Canaanite society'). In addition, the material culture and the prolonged period of co-existence is 'ultimately contrary' to the peaceful infiltration model (Fritz 1981:70-71).

Recent comprehensive surveys, undertaken by Finkelstein, Na'aman and Stager, have shown that during the 12$^{th}$ - 11$^{th}$ century BCE, in direct contrast to the rest of Canaan, the central hill country experienced a population explosion which is unlikely to have resulted from a natural increase alone (Dever 2003:98-99). This indicates that there were probably large numbers of immigrants from elsewhere (see 2.4), who had been motivated by an external factor, such as a fairly dramatic climate shift. The majority of the new settlements are small, unfortified agricultural villages (consisting of little more than clusters of four-room houses) in previously unoccupied areas and the pattern of settlement is one which would have avoided military confrontation. In other words, recent archaeological evidence is more in line with the peaceful infiltration and peasant revolt models, than the old conquest model. Using this survey data, Finkelstein and Dever have each suggested a model.

#### *2.3.4.2 The 'sedentarized nomads' model*

Finkelstein (1995:354-356) sees the long-term settlement history and demography of ancient Palestine as a cyclical process characterised by 'oscillations,' with alternating patterns of nomadization and sedentarization in response to changing political, economic and social circumstances. In the highlands, the Israelite settlement process is the third 'wave of settlement' (the other two being in the Late Chalcolithic-Early Bronze I and the Middle

Bronze II-III; each 'wave' being separated by an 'interval of decline'): nomads, who were produced by the destructions of the end of the Middle Bronze Age and who had remained nomadic throughout the Late Bronze Age, gradually became 'resedentarized.' According to him, this process occurred mainly in the late 12th century and even the 11th century BCE (except for 'Izbet Sartah). He sees significant continuities in the traits of the Iron I settlers and those of their Middle Bronze Age ancestors in, for example, domestic architecture, pottery, mountain-top 'cult places,' and the lack of fortifications (1995:358-359). In addition, he sees 'no undisputed archaeological evidence for a *direct* shift of a significant population migration from the lowlands to the highlands in the Late Bronze - Iron I transition' (1995:363).

*2.3.4.3 The 'agrarian frontier reform' model*

Dever (2003:167-189) has presented a compelling case for early Israel as an agrarian (ie, based on the principles of land reform and shared agricultural production), reformist, frontier society, which emerged from within Late Bronze Canaanite society. He sees the Canaanites (sedentarized peoples from the lowlands), together with a smaller number of pastoral nomads and groups of Semitic slaves who had escaped from Egypt, as being the authentic ancestors (the 'proto-Israelites') of the 'Israelite peoples.' Through the long cultural and socioeconomic struggles recounted in Judges (a process which began, according to him, in the 13th century BCE), a new agrarian, communitarian, and monotheistic society was eventually born. The family unit replaced the state apparatus and Dever feels that 'land reform must have been the driving force behind, and the ultimate goal of, the early Israelite movement' (2003:188). The *agrarian* character fits biblical descriptions (mainly those of Judges and Samuel 1 and 2) perfectly: Stager (1985a:11-23) has shown that the plans and layout of both the houses and overall villages in the early Israelite settlement sites (eg, 'Ai and Raddana; 12th - 11th centuries BCE) reflect the kind of social and economic structure portrayed during the period of the Judges (eg, in the description of *bet* Micah in Jdg 17-18). There is also some archaeological evidence (Dever 1992:40-48) for the indigenous origins of the early Israelites. Dever (1992:40-41,44-45) sees much more continuity than Finkelstein does with the late 13th century Late Bronze Age 'Canaanite' pottery repertoire and regards the differences in relative

percentages of types as less significant, suggesting that the settlers were not newcomers to Palestine.[6] A storage jar handle with an inscription in the local Canaanite alphabetic script (late 13th or early 12th century BCE) was found at Raddana. When a missing letter (the *dalet*) was restored by Callaway (1983:43), the inscription read 'Belonging to Ahilud.' References to 'Jehosaphat, the son of Ahilud' appear twice in the Hebrew Bible (2 Sm 8:16 and 20:24), suggesting that the early Israelites were culturally indistinct from the Canaanites. An abecedary on an ostracon from Silo 605 at 'Izbet Sartah (Str II; Kochavi 1977:4-13) is written in proto-Canaanite linear script (dated to ca 1200 BCE, on palaeographic grounds) and has 83 characters inscribed in five rows. The upper four rows seem to be some kind of student exercise, while the entire alphabet appears in the fifth row written from left to right. This find, which provides important evidence of literacy among the inhabitants of the hill country during the period of the Israelite settlement and the Judges, led Dever (1992:47) to conclude that the early Israelites of this period were still writing and speaking a language indistinguishable from that of the Canaanites. Dever, however, admits that his model is 'speculative ... [and] has little direct archaeological evidence to support it' (my insertion; 2003:179). The withdrawal of the hill country settlers from the lowlands of Canaan was not a 'flight from intolerable conditions or necessarily a revolutionary Yahwistic fervour ... but rather simply a quest for a new society and a new lifestyle. They wanted to start over. And in the end that *was* revolutionary' (2003:178).

6 According to Rainey (2008a:47), the new hill-country settlers could just as well have 'acquired their pottery traditions from their life on the Transjordanian plateau and the Jordan Valley.' A comparative chart of pottery, which was constructed by Christie J Goulart, showing the 13th and 12th century BCE vessels from 'Izbet Sartah, Shiloh and Tell el-'Umeiri and which appears in a recent article published by Rainey 2007:51), shows the same similarities as Dever's chart (2003:122-123); the latter chart compares the 12th century BCE pottery from 'Izbet Sartah and Shiloh with similar 13th century BCE pottery from three major cities to the west (Gezer, Lachish and Megiddo). In Rainey's view (2007:57-58) there is, in fact, nothing amongst the cultural features from the early 12th century BCE hill country areas that 'would suggest that this new population derived from the Late Bronze Canaanite areas on the coastal plains and valleys' and he remains convinced that: 'At least one major group of those settlers migrated from Transjordan and bore the ethnicon "sons of Israel."'

### 2.3.5 Conclusion

It is clear that of the two accounts in the Hebrew Bible of the settlement of Israel in Canaan, the two-century sociological and religious struggle against the prevailing Canaanite culture as described in the Book of Judges is a better fit with the current archaeological evidence; this suggests that Judges 1 rests on older and more authentic traditions, both oral and written. The author of the Book of Joshua, in fact, seems to have based the conquest narratives on later events of a military nature (eg, episodes of David's campaigns against the Philistines and Arameans), for the purposes of adding 'a sense of authenticity' (Na'aman 1994:259). Since these elements were 'borrowed from a different reality,' they obviously do not reflect the situation in Iron Age I. The peaceful infiltration model has no more to recommend it today than the conquest model, and the social revolution model has failed because of a total lack of supporting evidence. The symbiosis model sees a common origin for the Canaanites and the Israelites; however, according to Fritz, the Israelites did not form a group within Canaanite society - they merely lived alongside them for an extended period. Although not fully developed, this model is plausible and worthy of consideration.

Recent surveys (accompanied by a few excavations at selected sites) point to a demographic surge in Iron I (especially in the hill-country) and, according to Dever and Finkelstein, most of the newcomers were not foreign invaders, but came from somewhere within Canaanite society.[7] It would also appear that the overall settlement process was gradual and that there

7 Anson Rainey (2007:53-55; 2008a:49-50) has recently provided a very strong argument, based primarily on linguistics, for Transjordan, rather than the Canaanite lowlands, as the area of origin of the early Israelites (in keeping with the biblical narrative). He sees more linguistic affinities between Hebrew and the Transjordanian languages (eg, Aramaic and Moabite), than with coastal Canaanite. Although the Israelites adopted the Canaanite alphabet, Rainey has pointed out many examples of linguistic divergence in Hebrew from Ugaritic and Phoenician (Canaanite). For example, the root for the verb 'to be' in Phoenician and Ugaritic is *kwn*, while in Hebrew, Moabite and Aramaic it is *hwy* or *hyy*; the use of the relative pronoun 'that' (*asher*) in Hebrew and Moabite 'has no relationship to the Phoenician word *'is* that performs the same linguistic service;' while a number of 'word sequences (or syntagmas) used to narrate sequential actions,' although common to Hebrew, Moabite and Aramaic, are not the same as those used in coastal Phoenician. He thus concludes that Hebrew and Moabite should not be classified as Canaanite, but rather as Transjordanian languages. He says further that 'this provides a nearly airtight case' for a common origin for the ancient Hebrews, the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Aramaeans; that is, from the eastern steppe and not the Canaanite coastal cities (Rainey 2008a:50). He is also of the opinion that the early Israelites were 'simply one group among many *shasu* who were moving out of the steppe lands to find their livelihood in areas that would provide them with food in times of drought and famine' (Rainey 2008b:55).

are significant continuities with Late Bronze Age culture. However, Dever and Finkelstein differ with respect to the exact origins within Canaan. Finkelstein favours a large-scale resedentarization of local pastoral nomads, while Dever sees the origins of the newcomers as being much more varied, with fewer nomads and more sedentarized peoples from the lowlands.

The question arises: is a *single* model able to explain this obviously gradual, uneven and complex process? It is quite possible that the overall process involved elements from each of the models, ranging from some military activity to Dever's idealistic, almost utopian, theory. In addition, as has been pointed out by Na'aman (1994:238-239,246), the assumption that the settlement process in the hill country of Canaan took place in isolation from other areas of the ancient Near East is flawed; this process was synchronous with an unprecedented wave of migrations which were brought about by the historical events which occurred in Western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean in the late 13th - 12th centuries BCE. Documentary evidence has shown that drought and famine (see Chapter 5) played an important role in these large-scale migrations and it seems that, in addition to the Sea Peoples, various Syro-Anatolian groups, as well as West-Semitic-Syro-Mesopotamian pastoral groups reached Canaan. In other words, the inhabitants of the newly settled areas did not originate only from among the local Canaanite urban-rural-pastoral elements, but also included those from the former Hittite empire,[8] as well as perhaps those from northern Mesopotamia (cf the 'sons of Jacob,' whose eponymous father is described as 'a wandering Aramean' (Dt 26:5)). Others may possibly have been former Canaanites returning to Canaan after a sojourn in Egypt. According to Na'aman (1994:246), the 6th century description of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:3 ('Your origin

8 Kempinski (1979:43), on the other hand, has suggested that, rather than settling in the highlands, the Hittites would have settled in the coastal towns and cities, since they 'came from an outstanding urban society.' Should some of the settlers in the hill country have been Hittites, as suggested by Na'aman, then this question should be able to be answered relatively easily using mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA; this is the material of choice for population studies, since it much more abundant, evolves more quickly and is much smaller in size than nuclear DNA; Katzenberg & Harrison 1997:282). The Hittites are, after all, Indo-Europeans (Kempinski 1979:26) and their mtDNA should be easily distinguishable from that of Semites. Another method to determine ethnicity is by examining the stable isotopes in ancient bone. People from different cultures, and who live in different regions, often have different diets. Immigrants may thus be chemically distinct from the core group comprising the skeletal sample. Stable oxygen studies, for example, have been used by White and colleagues (cited by Katzenberg & Harrison 1997:275) to characterize the geographical origin of individuals, based on different ethnic groups, from the ancient city-state of Teotihuacan.

and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite') 'nicely reflects the kind of telescoped history that remained in the collective memory hundreds of years after the close of the events.' Nevertheless, I find myself in general agreement with Dever with respect to where the majority of settlers might have originated. That the central highlands were populated by Canaanites is supported by several artifacts from villages between Jerusalem and Jezreel. Three cuneiform tablets, discovered in the destruction debris of the initial phase of a pillar-type building (dating to the first half of the 12th century BCE), closely resemble three texts from Ugarit and a further two from Canaan. Two ostraca written in South Canaanite, discovered in an area of Iron I pillar-houses in the foothill town of Beth-shemesh, 'are most closely parallelled', according to Callaway (1985:76), to an inscribed jar handle from Raddana. This would suggest that the people of Beth-shemesh had some relationship with those from Raddana in the highlands. Numerous bronze and pottery artifacts, as well as several iron tools from 'Ai and Raddana also have cultural parallels in the coastal regions (Callaway 1985:77).

## 2.4 ETHNICITY AND EARLY ISRAEL

Two questions now arise: is it possible to identify a new ethnic entity in the archaeological record of the hill country in Iron I; and are we able to learn the origins of the settlers from this record?

### 2.4.1 The Merneptah Stele

The only potentially relevant textual evidence for the emergence of ethnicity in early Israel is that in the Hebrew Bible and the Merneptah Stele. However, as mentioned above, the books of Joshua and possibly even parts of Judges, which deal with the Israelites' occupation of the land and life prior to emergence of the monarchy, were written long after the events they purport to describe and reflect the world view of their authors who lived in the monarchic period or later.

The earliest and most secure extra-biblical textual reference to 'Israel' is the 'Victory Stele' of the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah, erected in Thebes in his fifth regnal year (ca 1207 BCE) to commemorate his victory over the Libyan tribes in the west. After listing several defeated peoples, the obverse of the victory hymn reads (Na'aman 1994:247):

> Ashkelon has been overcome, Gezer has been captured,
>
> Yeno'am was made non-existent;
>
> Israel is laid waste (and) his seed is not.

The three Canaanite cities are well known from other Egyptian inscriptions; the name 'Israel,' however, does not appear in any other Egyptian source (Na'aman 1994:247). Evidence that the reference to the latter refers to a distinct ethnic group (which appears to have been located in Canaan, following the order of toponyms in the passage) comes from the fact that it is followed by the Egyptian plural determinative sign for 'peoples' and is obviously not describing either a kingdom or a city-state. In other words, somewhere in the land of Canaan prior to1200 BCE there was a people called 'Israel,' who were well-enough established to be a threat to the security of Egypt's declining Asiatic empire (Na'aman 1994:247-248).

A partially preserved Egyptian relief from Karnak, previously attributed to Ramesses II (ca 1279-1212 BCE), portrays the conquest of three fortified cities and the defeat of a forth enemy in the open country. The name of only one city, that of Ashkelon, has been preserved in the accompanying inscriptions. Yurco (cited by Singer 1994:287) has suggested that the relief should rather be ascribed to Merneptah and that the other two cities are Gezer and Yeno'am, while the enemy in the open country is Israel. Redford (1986:188-200), on the basis of the location of the reliefs and the adjoining inscriptions, has however rejected Yurco's proposal regarding the dating of the relief to Merneptah and has also raised doubts about the historical reliability of the Canaanite list on the 'Israel Stele.' In his view, the Victory Hymn was plagiarised from the inscriptions of Ramesses II at Karnak, that the term/word 'Israel' was substituted for 'Shasu' and that it is possible that it describes nothing more than a limited and unimportant Egyptian expedition to Gezer. Regardless of the date of the relief, the securely-dated information from the stele concerning the campaign to Canaan remains significant.

There is little consensus among scholars as to the location of Merneptah's 'Israel' (or, for that matter, the character of the group 'Israel'), although the location is usually identified with the area of Shechem, an important Israelite centre during the early monarchic period where several Iron I settlements have been discovered. According to Na'aman (1994:248-249), this (or any other suggestion) is little more than 'guesswork' and, without further evidence, 'it is best to refrain from building on this isolated reference any hypothesis concerning the location and formation of Israel at that time, [since] the maintenance of a name of a social organization does not necessarily imply any other sort of cultural continuity' (my insertion). Whitelam (1996:207) feels that, although it confirms that some entity called Israel was in existence at this time, it neither confirms nor denies whether it was 'a tribal organization or "geographically extensive,"' while Thompson (1999:79) states that Merneptah's Israel 'does not correspond with the highland Israel or any biblical Israel' and that the terms 'Canaan' and 'Israel' on the Stele are both 'metaphorical parents of three towns destroyed by the Egyptian army' (ie, Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yen'oam; 1999:81).

Hasel (1994:53-54), using corroborative evidence from Egyptian military campaigns, has nevertheless concluded that the term 'seed' (*prt*), in the clause in which 'Israel' appears, means 'grain' (the destruction of grain was a common Egyptian military tactic). The phrase 'his grain is not' (ie, the food supply/subsistence has been destroyed) thus supports the identification of 'Israel' as a rural, agriculturally-based, sedentary socioethnic entity without its own city-state support system. Rainey (2001:57), on the other hand, is of the opinion that the citations used 'do not really support Hasel's contention that *prt* should be rendered "grain," and not "seed," "fruit" (= progeny).' Working with the Merneptah inscription, the reliefs at Karnak (which he attributes to Merneptah), a number of Ramesside texts (which utilise both *prt* 'seed,' 'fruit' and *mnyt* 'root' in the metaphors of destruction) and recently presented data of an archaeological and ethnographical nature (mainly that of Evelyn van der Steen 1996; 1997; cited by Rainey 2001:57-75), he concludes that the evidence from the Merneptah context contains nothing that suggests that the destruction of 'grain' is intended; neither is there any indication that 'Israel' was - or was not - a sedentary, agricultural people (Rainey 2001:64,66). The expression 'his seed is not' is 'clearly meant to indicate that Israel has been annihilated like a plant whose seed/fruit has been destroyed' (Rainey 2001:74).

### 2.4.2 The *'apiru* and the *shasu*

#### *2.4.2.1 The* 'apiru

Egyptian sources use several terms to refer to the various peoples of Canaan. Two of these, the *'apiru* and the *shasu*, are of interest in the search for the origins of the early Israelites; both chose or were compelled, either by war, famine or heavy taxation, to live on the fringes of Canaanite urban society. The *'apiru*[9] (*hapiru* or *habiru*) are described in a variety of unflattering ways in the 14th century BCE Amarna letters. These letters comprise part of the diplomatic and military correspondence of the pharaohs Amenhotep III and his son, Akhenaten, and they are arguably the most detailed source for the social, political and demographic conditions in Canaan, a hundred or so years before the supposed date of the Israelite 'Conquest' (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:77-78). Six of these letters were written to the pharaoh of Egypt by his vassal Abdi-Heba, the king of Canaanite Jerusalem. The king makes frequent complaints in his letters about the *'apiru* (eg, they 'have plundered all the lands of the king'/'have taken the very cities of the king'); when he feels that the pharaoh is not being sufficiently helpful to him he complains that he is being 'treated like a *'apiru*;' Rainey 2008b:51). Since the discovery of the Amarna letters, many hundreds of references (from the 18th to the 12th century BCE) to *'apiru* from Egypt, Nuzi, Syria, Canaan and, more recently, a 21.5cm-high square cuneiform prism listing 438 names of *'apiru* from Anatolia, have been discovered (Rainey 2008b:52). The word *'apiru* in these references, as well as the personal names, make it clear that it is not an ethnic designation, but referred to a number of disenfranchised social groups, that inhabited the fringes of Bronze Age Near Eastern society.

Several kinds of *'apiru* are mentioned and the word is used sometimes for individuals and sometimes for the members of a group (eg, for a mutineer or pauper; for the groups of bandits who attack and plunder, especially in times of disintegrating rule; for servants and slaves; for some of those who became a ruler's militia or individuals who had been recruited for the

9 The Akkadian syllabic script used in the Amarna Letters and other cuneiform documents obscures the true Semitic form of the word. The correct word, according to Rainey (2008b:55 n 1), is *'apiru* ('dusty,' 'dirty').

militia, some of whom were given lands and estates as rewards; Rainey 2008b:52-53). Papyrus Leiden 348, for example, reports that 'the *'apiru* ... are dragging stone to the great pylon of [///]' for the construction of a palace and the 18th Dynasty tomb of Intef depicts the *'apiru* pressing grapes (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:35). They are, however, never mentioned as pastoralists ('shepherds,' as the Hebrews are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible; Gn 46:32; 47:3), nor were they members of a tribe (Rainey 2008b:52-53).

Some scholars have attempted to relate *'apiru* and Hebrew (*'ivri*). It should be noted, however, that the root of *'ivri* means 'to cross over,' while the Akkadian root of *'apiru* means something like 'freebooter' (Dever 2003:74). Rainey (2008b:53), for example, is convinced that it is linguistically impossible to equate the two and he describes these efforts as nothing short of 'silly' and 'absurd mental gymnastics' by 'wishful thinkers who tend to ignore the reality of linguistics.' In his opinion, the term *shasu*, the second group living outside mainstream Canaanite society, provides a more accurate depiction of early Israel - not linguistically, but socially.

#### *2.4.2.2 The* shasu

As pointed out by Coote and Whitelam (1987:106), the only 'picture' we have of the *shasu* is that 'seen through Egyptian scribal and artistic eyes.' It would appear that their territory covered a large area: from Libya and the eastern Egyptian desert, to the Palestinian highlands and steppes. The places listed in one of Amenhotep III's texts would seem to indicate that 'the land of the *shasu*' (*t3-sh3sw*) refers to Transjordan, while it is connected to Mount Seir (probably in the highlands of Edom) on an obelisk of Ramesses II and is identified with Edom and Moab, as well as Mount Seir in other sources[10] (Coote & Whitelam 1987:106-107). They were also encountered by the Egyptians west of Transjordan from southern Syria to the Negev (Gottwald 1979:457). The term *shasu* means either 'pastoralist' or 'plunderer' and it is used repeatedly in Egyptian texts from the 15th century BCE onwards (eg, in Papyrus Anastasi VI

10 As early as the 13th century BCE, Egyptian texts refer to a deity called Yahweh, placing him among the *shasu* of southern Transjordan (Dever 2003:128), where some biblical texts also locate the origins of Yahweh's cult (eg, Jdg 5:4).

(see 2.2.5); the *shasu* are also mentioned in a text from Karnak dating to the reign of Seti I (ca 1291 BCE), as pastoralists on the mountain ridges of Canaan). In addition, they are mentioned in topographical lists from the Late Bronze Age and are depicted in Egyptian art as prisoners wearing bag-shaped headdresses (eg, on a faience tile from the Late Bronze temple of Medinet Habu, near Luxor; Rainey 2008b:53-4). To the Egyptian mind, it would appear that the terms *'apiru* and *shasu* refer to 'the same kind of people,' that is, 'a social not an ethnic group' (Coote & Whitelam 1987:107). The Beth-shan stela of Seti I, for example, describes both groups in precisely the same way. In the Amarna Letters, the Akkadian form of the word is *sutu*. Although they sometimes worked as mercenaries or labourers for Canaanite kings, they are usually identified as nomadic pastoralists. Some scholars identify them as Bedouin (eg, Dever 2003:28; Coote & Whitelam 1987:107-108), originating from the steppe east of the Jordan - a description which is strikingly similar to that of the biblical description of early Israel's wanderings. Gottwald (1979:458), on the other hand, is of the opinion that identifying them with Bedouin 'gives an unjustified socio-economic skewing of the term ... because the primary reference is to "pillagers" or "plunderers" rather than to pastoral nomads of any sort.' He sees the *'apiru* as outlaws or refugees 'from politically centralized communities,' but without 'a native region of their own,' while the *shasu* 'were perceived as having a continuous tribal - that is, politically centralized - social organization, with a known or supposed land base.' In addition, he (1979:478) does not accept that pastoral nomads can be militarised to the extent suggested of the *shasu*. The coptic word *shos*, 'shepherd,' indicates the pastoral emphasis of *sh3sw* (Coote & Whitelam 1987:184, n 14). Rainey (2008b:55) thus comes to the conclusion, that, the Israelites were originally *shasu* and that the Israelites, Midianites, Moabites and Edomites most probably had a common origin.

In my opinion, it would be absurd to conclude that all the settlers in the hill country originated from the coastal lowlands or that they were all originally *shasu*. It is quite possible that the new rural-pastoral society of the early Iron Age, although primarily from the lowland Canaanite city-states, was a mixture of new and old elements from within and without Palestine and, perhaps, even included an 'exodus group' that had been in the Egyptian delta.

### 2.4.3 Ethnicity and its cultural characteristics

Ethnicity may be expressed by cultural characteristics such as language, script, physical features, ritual behaviour, dietary choices, and in various aspects of material culture (Finkelstein 1996:203). With respect to the latter, ethnicity can be expressed in the style of the clothing and artifacts (eg, pottery, lithics, jewellery, basketry, and weaponry), architectural forms, religion and mortuary practices. It, nevertheless, remains difficult to delineate clear ethnic boundaries, even when these traits are visible or traceable (eg, in contemporary societies). Ethnic lines tend to be blurred by assimilation and acculturation processes; complex sociological and psychological factors influence group identity; expressions of status are difficult to distinguish from manifestations of ethnicity; and it may be impossible to distinguish between the reflection of 'style' and ethnicity in material culture.

Although Dever (1995:200-213; 2003:154) remains optimistic on the question of defining ethnicity in the archaeological record, the general consensus among scholars is that the evidence suffers from many limitations. The material culture from the Iron I sites in the hill country of Cisjordan and the Transjordan plateau is almost identical, 'though they gave birth to different *ethnoi* and national identities' (Finkelstein 1996:200). According to Mazar (1994:91), 'research has failed to develop tools which enable one to differentiate between the material culture of the Israelites and that of other ethnic groups in the hill country;' Edelman (1996:25) is of the opinion that 'given the present state of textual and artifactual evidence, nothing can be said about the ethnicity of pre-monarchic Israel.' According to Thompson (1999:234): 'The concept of ethnicity ... is a fiction, created by writers;' in addition: 'Ethnicity is hardly a common aspect of human existence at this very early period' (1997:175). Finkelstein and Na'aman (1994a:17) have stated that 'any effort to distinguish between "Israelite" and "non-Israelite" hill country sites during the twelfth-eleventh centuries BCE according to their finds is doomed to failure.'

#### *2.4.3.1 Terracing and the hewing of water cisterns*

Dever (2001:113,117) has suggested that the emergence of Israel in the hill country of Canaan was made possible by two technological innovations: terracing and the hewing of water cisterns. With respect to those sites which were devoid of water, the inhabitants apparently brought water from distant springs and stored it in the typical large Iron I storage jars. Recent surveys have revealed that the central hill country was densely settled as early as the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE and that many of the sites dating to these periods were located in hilly areas devoid of any permanent water sources (Finkelstein 1996:201). There is evidence that terracing[11] was practised already in the Early Bronze Age (Finkelstein & Na'aman 1994a:11-12) and that the Iron I settlement process began in those areas of the hill country where there was no necessity for their construction (eg, the desert fringe, the intermontane valleys of the central range, as well as flat areas such as the Bethel plateau), while the hewing of water cisterns was mastered in the Middle Bronze Age and, perhaps, even in the Early Bronze Age. In other words, neither terracing nor the hewing of water cisterns were Israelite innovations and they do not tell us anything about the origins of the settlers.

*2.4.3.2 Religion and cult*

While religion and cult are potentially of great significance for determining ethnicity (see Chapter 4), the early Iron I settlements are relatively poor in finds. There were no monumental structures such as temples (cf the Late Bronze Age in Palestine). The dearth of cult vessels, however, may suggest an absence of elaborate cult or organised religious personnel (Dever 1995:205). In addition, virtually no 12th century cemeteries and very few individual burials have been located.

11 It is interesting to note that the Ugaritic texts contain the earliest references to terraces in the Levant. Mot the god of death, for example, is said to have been 'seized by vine-dressers who prune, bind and drop him to the terrace' (Callaway 1985:76). Terracing technologies would have been known to the people of the lowlands and coastal areas of Palestine prior to the settlement period. During the Late Bronze Age there was a brisk trade between Ugarit and the Canaanite coastal cities south of Tyre; some Canaanite merchants are even known to have resided in Ugarit or its port city, Minet el-Beidah. In any event, technologies such as terracing 'are reflective not of ethnicity but of ancient agriculture's adaptation to its environment' (Thompson 1997:175). Thompson (1997:176) has pointed out the vast difference between the lifestyle of, for example, an olive grower in the central highlands and that of a coastal fisherman and that: 'These are not ethnically marked distinctions, but quite ordinary classifications of demographic and economic aspects of the population of a complex region.'

The only other significant features (in the absence of written material) for determining the ethnicity of the inhabitants (Finkelstein 1996:204), are pottery, architecture (both the house form and the site layout), and dietary choices (as reflected in the faunal assemblages).

*2.4.3.3 Pottery and architecture*

As mentioned above, the four-room house and the dominance of collared-rim storage jars in the hill country are no longer considered to be ethnic indicators; rather they reflect economic, environmental and social factors. Only one possible Late Bronze prototype of the four-room house (at Tel Batash) has, thus far, been found in the numerous Late Bronze sites excavated (Finkelstein 1996:201). The four-room house reflects the necessity of the settlers, who had limited labour power and resources, and multi-use needs, to adapt to a hilly environment. The settlement layout (a large courtyard surrounded by a belt of broadrooms) is common to Early Bronze II sites in Sinai and Middle Bronze sites in the Black Desert (in the Western Desert in Egypt), as well as the Negev Highlands sites during the late - $11^{th}$ / $10^{th}$ centuries (1996:206). Having an open space within the site, which would serve as a shelter to protect flocks, 'is a common-sense approach to living in the hill country,' bearing in mind the importance of animals to the local economy (Edelman 1996:46,47).

Although the pottery continues Late Bronze 'Canaanite' ceramic traditions generally (although 'with cruder execution;' Chaney 1983:61), except for a few rare vessels there are no special features in the pottery of the Iron I highlands sites. In addition, as Edelman (1996:43) has pointed out, since pottery is an acquired skill requiring knowledge of tempers, clay beds, kilns, and (in the Iron Age) wheel techniques, it is doubtful whether each village would have been able to support its own potter. It is thus quite possible that the settlers obtained their ceramic vessels from either itinerant potters or regional pottery workshops, regardless of their ethnic background. 'Under such circumstances, peoples of diverse ethnic origins would have quickly come to share a common ceramic tradition' (1996:44). In other words, architectural forms and pottery in Iron I sites on both sides of the Jordan river reflect environmental, social, and economic traits of the settlers, rather their ethnicity. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Faust (2006:17,31) has recently suggested that the avoidance of imported pottery during the

Iron Age should be viewed as part of Israel's boundary maintenance[12] and that its origins should be sought in Israel's ethnogenesis. In common with other groups, the Israelites either used or avoided various elements of material culture, in order to keep themselves distinct and separate from their neighbours. It is clear that there was a period of intense trade in the Mediterranean and the Levant during the Iron Age (especially in Iron II) and imported pottery has been found at almost every excavated coastal site, from Tyre in the north to Ashkelon in the south. On the other hand, sites in the kingdom of Judah and the central hill country sites of the kingdom of Israel (eg, Beth-shemesh, Gibeon and Hebron) have produced either extremely small quantities of imported pottery, or none at all. This, however, is not due to a lack of trade: non-ceramic evidence would tell us otherwise. For example, imported timber (cedar) remains were found at Iron Age Beersheba (10th - 8th centuries BCE; Liphschitz & Waisel 1973:31,33,35), in the Negev, which lies on what is considered to be an important Arabian trade route, fish bones from the Mediterranean were discovered at the City of David and in the Ophel and shells, which had originated in the Red Sea, the Mediterranean or the Nile River, were uncovered at Jerusalem - evidence which testifies to a mundane trade with the Mediterranean region (Faust 2006:18-23). The extremely small quantities of imported pottery found at Beersheba and Jerusalem would tend to indicate that the inhabitants 'viewed these pottery vessels in a different way than their contemporaries' (eg, in Tyre and Megiddo) and that imported pottery was not 'culturally accepted' (Faust 2006:25). The ceramic repertoire does not only display a lack or rarity of imports; the ceramics also lacked decoration. According to Faust (2006:27), this situation 'cannot be explained by functional or economic reasons, and must be a result of cultural attitudes towards decoration.'

Faust (2006:26) has also pointed out that the avoidance of imported pottery by Israel in the Iron Age is not a unique phenomenon and he has cited the contrast, in the late 18th century, between Salem and Richmond, in North Carolina, as an example from the 'New World.' Salem, a Moravian site (a German-speaking religious group), was the centre of pottery importation for the region and when imported pottery was in short supply, the town produced local imitations. Richmond, on the other hand, was the central city of the region. Ceramic

12 The absence of imported pottery may also be accounted for by the fact that a subsistence economy 'would not produce major concentrations of wealth or trade in either luxury wares or commodities' (Chaney 1983:61).

analysis of the two sites has revealed a clear difference: 58% of the pottery from Richmond was of the 'British style,' while only 21% from Salem was of this style. Although Salem either imported or produced this style, it is apparent that they avoided using it 'as it symbolized a world they didn't want to be part of' (Faust 2006:26).

In biblical Hebrew, the term 'Canaanite' is often used for one who engages in trade (eg, Hs 12:7; Faust 2006:27). 'Traders,' like 'Canaanites' were obviously viewed in a negative light. 'At least in their propaganda the Israelites were condescending towards traders and commerce' (King & Stager 2001:190), whether or not most traders were Canaanites.

*2.4.3.4 Dietary choices*

Dietary choices tend to be 'conservative symbols of ethnicity,' with food being 'one of the primary symbols manipulated by people seeking to maintain their cultural identity and group solidarity' (Finkelstein 1996:206). Even when faced with potential assimilation, some groups resist change. It should be noted, however, that in certain cases the culinary practices of a particular group may be influenced by acculturation processes, inter-cultural contacts, and the availability/scarcity of certain foods.

Archaeo-zoological data on the percentage of pig bones in faunal assemblages are of special importance for the study of ethnicity in the Iron Age. Pig farming is a rewarding endeavour. Pigs are able to grow and reproduce rapidly, have a docile nature and are suitable for both small and large scale husbandry, making them the ideal animals for newcomers in the initial phases of establishing themselves (Hesse 1990:196,199). It is thus unsurprising that pigs (both wild and domestic) have been a feature of the Middle East for millennia. Unfortunately, in the past, pig bones were not routinely collected by archaeologists (Dever 1983:582, n 9). Recently, however, a number of sites have been fairly thoroughly sampled for bones and the regional patterns which have emerged are able to shed some light on the origins of the traditions and prohibitions regarding pork consumption (Hesse 1990:197).

Pork was a relatively common commodity in Bronze Age Palestine, both in the lowlands and the highlands, as well as in Iron I Philistia (Hesse 1990:211; 216). The important Philistine

communities of Tel Miqne, Tel Batash and Ashkelon, on the southern coastal plain, show a sharp rise in pig remains at the onset of the Iron Age. At Ashkelon, the percentage of pig remains rose from 4% at the end of the Late Bronze Age to 19% in the 12th century BCE; similarly, at Ekron (Tel Miqne), it rose from 8% to 18% and at Timnah (Tel Batash), from 5% to 8% (Hesse 1990:216). Later in the Iron Age, however, the use of pigs declined. The Philistines specialised in cattle- and pig-raising, in addition to sheep and goats (the most common domestic livestock among the Israelites and the Canaanites). The Mycenaeans and later Greeks were well known for their preference for pork in the diet - a preference that the Philistines brought with them to Canaan in the 12th century (Stager 1995:344). Pig bones are absent from some architectural contexts at Ekron and Batash, but are commonly found in others (eg, the 'pig rich' Iron I room complexes at Batash yielded values of around 14%; Hesse 1990:218). It is interesting to note, however, that these bones do not appear to be associated with cultic rites. Pigs are, for example, absent from an elite building at the centre of Ekron, thought to be a cultic centre, while the sanctuary at Tell Qasile, yielded only 1.5% pig bones (Hesse 1990:216,218). In addition, pig usage appears to have been the practised by only certain social classes or sectors of Philistine society (ie, according to 'the principle of ethnic distain;' Hesse 1990:198).

In the proto-Israelite Iron I highland villages, pigs were either extremely rare (Shiloh 0.7%) or completely absent (eg, 'Ai, Radanna and Mt. Ebal; Hesse 1990:216; Finkelstein 1996:206). Hesse was able to find only one pig bone in the Iron Age collections from 'Ai and Radanna; he believes, however, that their presence may be explained by the close proximity of Byzantine remains. At 'Izbet Sartah, one of earliest settlements, five bones from the 1041 remains were identified as pig bones; they are, however, also considered to be intrusive from Byzantine levels (Hesse 1990:216). On the other hand, pigs appear to have been quite popular during Iron I and II at Hesban (Heshbon), a proto-Ammonite site in Transjordan (Finkelstein 1996:206). The absence of pig bones in the hill country settlements appears to be an expression of culture, rather than ecology. During the pre-monarchic period, as they were forging their identity, the settlers probably developed the pork taboo in contrast to their neighbours - the pig (as was the case with circumcision) becoming a distinctive cultural marker between the Israelites and those around them. It is noteworthy that, although the distain for pork 'can be linked to an important food of the traditional enemy ... this argument

is weakened by the lack of evidence that the Philistines were symbolically tied to the animal' (Hesse 1990:220). Finkelstein (1996:206) has suggested that 'pig taboos ... may be the most valuable tool for the study of ethnicity of a given, single Iron I site.'

Stager (1991:31) draws attention to anthropologist Marvin Harris' hypothesis that 'kosher' (*kashrut*) rules may be explained primarily by ecological considerations, while other scholars argue for a much later date for the introduction of dietary restrictions. However, a strictly ecological perspective refutes Harris' hypothesis. The oak-pine-terebinth woodlands which dominated the central hill country of Canaan, would have been ideally suited to pig production, especially because of the shade and acorns (see Chapter 5). According to Stager (1991:31): 'One reason why such a hog-acorn economy did not thrive in the early Israelite environment must ultimately be rooted in very early religious taboos that forbade the consumption of pork.' According to Hesse (1990:219), irrespective of when the dietary restrictions in Deuteronomy and Leviticus were originally written, from the physical evidence concerning pig bones, the final editing of these books must have been 'done in a period when pork consumption was an almost invisible subsistence alternative.' Presumably, these rules would not have been made to forbid something that was not being practised. In other words, 'the laws are of greater antiquity than the late Iron Age.'

#### *2.4.3.5 Conclusion*

It is obviously extremely difficult to draw any conclusions from the archaeological record about the origins of the hill-country settlers. During the pre-monarchic period, these new settlers (irrespective of origin), would probably not even have identified themselves as part of Israel.'[13] There is a substantial difference between today's notion of ethnicity and that current in the ancient Near East. Modern society possesses very definite ideas concerning identity -

13 Although it may be argued that the Iron I settlers had 'no consciousness of ethnic identity' until the monarchic period. Rainey (2007:57) has pointed out that the other outsiders (he is convinced that the bulk of the settlers in the hill country came from a Transjordanian, pastoralist origin (2001:74-75)) who invaded sedentary areas in the Late Bronze Age (eg, the Libyans into the Egyptian Delta, the Phrygians/Mushku into Anatolia and, later, the Sea Peoples into Canaan) were all aware of their ethnic identities. 'So why should scholars insist that the new immigrants in the hill country areas of Galilee, Samaria and Judaea would not have brought with them a consciousness of their own ethnic identity?' (Rainey 2007:57).

one which accords 'well with the division of our world into nation-states' (Lemche 1991:52). In the ancient Near East, 'no such nation-states existed and no nationalistic ideology had yet arisen.' Using Buccellati's concepts (1967; cited by Lemche 1991:52, n 101) of a 'territorial state' and a 'national state,' the city-states of Palestine in the Bronze Age were all territorial states; the later Israelite kingdom, on the other hand, was a national state. Prior to this 'the inhabitants of this area never considered themselves to be citizens of nations or nation-states and they never thought of themselves as belonging to a definite *ethnos* in contrast to other *ethne*' (Lemche 1991:52). In other words, the development of distinctive national, or ethnic, affiliations in Cis- and Transjordan was a slow and gradual process and the various national identities only emerged later with the rise of new political frameworks. With the possible exception of different dietary practices, as reflected in faunal assemblages as early as Iron I, most 'ethnic' features in the material culture developed and were introduced by the Monarchy, presumably as a means of creating a sense of nationalism and ethnic identity. And, perhaps, it is worth remembering the French sociologist, Francois Simiand's, warning to avoid bowing down before the 'idol of origins' and to be less concerned about 'when a phenomenon first began to appear rather than when it became important' (1903; cited by Stager 1985b:86).

# CHAPTER 3

## THE CANAANITES

If, as scholars such as Finkelstein and Dever have suggested, the majority of the Iron I settlers in the hill country were drawn from the indigenous population of Canaan (whether local pastoral nomads or sedentarized peoples from the lowlands), then it is worthwhile to consider what, in fact, we know about the territory, culture, society, and, in particular, the religious beliefs and practices, including burial customs, of the Canaanites.

At the outset, it should be pointed out that the ancient inhabitants of Canaan do not appear to have known that they were Canaanites. The term 'Canaanite' was used rather by those outside of the area when referring 'in a more or less casual manner' to the inhabitants of the south-western Levant (Lemche 1997:152). As Thompson (1999:81) has observed: 'The only historical group known to refer to themselves as Canaanites were Jewish merchants of North Africa in the fourth century CE.' According to Lemche (1991:57): 'Displaced persons, who may have lost their homeland and have settled in other parts of world, as was the case with the Punic population of North Africa, could very well have kept an old ethnic identity alive although this very identity had never been equally evident to their forefathers in Western Asia.' Gray (1964:16) is of the opinion, that the term 'Amorite' is probably 'more appropriate' than 'Canaanite' 'as an ethnic term denoting the Semitic substratum of the population of Syria and Palestine in the second millennium.' Na'aman (1994:241), on the other hand, considers the term 'Amorite' to be 'an archaic nonhistorical name.' In the absence of a more appropriate term, and for the sake of convenience, the term 'Canaanite' will thus be used in this discussion. In addition, no distinction has been made between the terms 'Canaanite' and 'Amorite,' since they are largely interchangeable in the biblical literature (eg, in Jdg 1:34-36 ('Amorites') and in Jdg 1:29; Jos 16:10 ('Canaanites')) and refer to the autochthonous population of Palestine - the biblical 'inhabitants of the land' (Gn 50:11) or 'who were born in the land' (1 Chr 7:21).

Although Canaan plays a prominent role in the Hebrew Bible as the Promised Land (the term

'Canaan' appears 94 times and 'Canaanite' appears 74 times; Lemche 1991:63), and a central theme is its possession, loss and partial recovery, we are told little about the inhabitants other than their wickedness, which justified their extermination. They apparently had neither a central or eponymous city, nor a separate history or culture. In addition, they do not appear to have exerted an imperial rule over other lands. They did not leave behind a national epic which could serve as an historical source analogous to the Hebrew Bible and the few inscriptions from the period itself are of little help to the historian. It is ironic that the Canaanites, who gave mankind the first alphabet, left behind so few inscriptions to document their history. Lacking texts ostensibly by Canaanites, providing information about themselves or other Canaanites, our knowledge is largely dependent on the witness of other peoples, especially the Ugaritic texts (the nearest texts yet discovered to a corpus of Canaanite literature). Other sources include Egyptian documents, such as the Amarna letters, and those in the various languages using cuneiform script (Millard 1973:29).

## 3.1 THE LAND OF CANAAN

The territory 'Canaan' is a little easier to define than the term 'Canaanite' and, here, even the Hebrew Bible provides some information. There is no doubt that, by the middle of the second millennium BCE, a specific region was known as 'Canaan.' The term, 'Canaan,' which denotes a culture rather than a distinctive ethnic group, derives from the *kinahna* (Greek: *phoinix* and, hence, Phoenicia) and was used by the Semites of Mesopotamia in the second millennium to indicate the Syrian coast (from the Gulf of Alexandretta to Carmel Head), from which they obtained the much-prized purple dye (*kinahhu*; Gray 1964:15-16,47) produced by marine sea snails (*Murex* species) - the reddish-purple colour of the dye, reminded the Greeks of the mythical firebird, the phoenix; the Phoenicians, however, referred to themselves as Tyrians or Sidonites, after their two principal coastal cities: Tyre and Sidon (Hillel 2006:170-171).

Another explanation of the etymology of the term 'Canaan' is that it is derived from the Semitic verbal root *kn'*, which is well represented in Hebrew and means 'to be humble,' 'to be depressed' (Lemche 1991:26). If correct, the meaning of Canaan could well be 'the low

country' or just 'lowland.' On the other hand, as De Vaux (1968; cited by Lemche 1991) has pointed out, the term could simply be 'a very old geographical name for which no obvious etymological explanation can be offered - irrespective of the fact that the name is itself certainly Semitic.'

The earliest mention of Canaan in Egyptian texts appears in a text from the time of Amenophis II (ca 1427-1401 BCE), where 640 Canaanite captives are listed. Prior to this, and from the beginning of the second millennium, Palestine and southern Syria were referred to as Retenu, with chiefly 'Asiatic' inhabitants, Djahy (an interchangeable term), and then Hurru. The 'Canaanite slaves of Hurru' are mentioned in a Ramesside papyrus and Canaan and Hurru are included, along with Israel and others, on the 'Israel Stele' of Merneptah (Millard 1973:30,32; Lemche 1991:43,48).

In his autobiography, Idri-mi, prince of Aleppo (in modern Syria), in the 15th century BCE recounts how he was driven from his home and found refuge in the town of Ammiya (Efneh, ca 13km down the coast from Tripolis, in Northern Lebanon) in Canaan and, after Idri-mi had finally gained the throne, the land of Canaan is mentioned as the home of persons listed in three tablets from Alalakh (Tell Atshana, on the lower Orontes), roughly contemporary with Amenophis II or slightly earlier (Millard 1973:32,49, n 14). From the Amarna letters (14th century BCE), where Canaan or the Canaanites are mentioned twelve times (although only once is the population of Canaan intended; Lemche 1991:31), the limits of Canaan as an Egyptian province can be stated with some confidence.[14] The natural limits to the west and the east, were the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, respectively. The Sinai desert to the south would appear to have been beyond Canaan, with Gaza the first major town ('the town of Canaan,' which also served as an administrative centre) on the road from Egypt. The northern limit, although more difficult to discern, appears to have been the province of Upe (named after the Damascus area, but including the Beq'a) and the territory controlled by the Amurru. Biblical sources (Nm 34:2-12, and elsewhere) reveal the same borders to the west, east and

14 Lemche (1991:39) has concluded that the precise indication of the exact territory of Canaan, in the Amarna correspondence, is anything but clear. 'Evidently the inhabitants of the supposed Canaanite territory in Western Asia had no clear idea of the actual size of this Canaan, nor did they know exactly where Canaan was situated.' All the ancient sources tell us, is that Canaan 'must be placed somewhere in Western Asia, most likely along the Mediterranean coast' (1991:53). Its location only becomes clear at the end of the Hellenistic period, 'because of the identification of Canaan with Phoenicia' (1991:154).

south, while the northern border (although less certain) appears to have been beyond the Lebanon range in the upper valley of the Orontes at Lebo-Hamath (now Lebweh), sweeping around the Anti-Lebanon to the edge of the desert, and then south through the Hauran, turning westwards to the Sea of Galilee. Thus, from biblical descriptions and extra-biblical writers of the latter part of the second millennium, Canaan at the time of the Israelite settlement (ca 1200 BCE) stretched from the northern limit of Lebanon, including the Damascene and Bashan to the east, to the Negev (ie, all the territory held by Egypt following the peace treaty with the Hittites in 1284 BCE; Millard 1973:32-33).

## 3.2 CULTURE AND SOCIETY

A commencement date for the identification of the 'Canaanites' is difficult (Gray 1964:23; Millard 1973:36,38), but for Old Testament purposes, an upper limit for 'Canaanite culture' can be fixed at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age city-life (ca 1850 BCE). The end point for 'Canaanite culture,' in the context of this discussion, is taken as the end of the Bronze Age, although it is acknowledged that the Phoenicians were little more than latter-day Canaanites. The Canaanite population of the Late Bronze Age, as revealed by personal names in the Amarna letters and related tablets from Palestinian sites, as well as the archives from Ugarit, was a predominantly Semitic population, but included some Hurrians and Indo-Europeans (Millard 1973:42). The major highways and fertile districts were ruled by numerous city-states, each with its own king, and none of the frequent alliances resulted in any lasting hegemony. While Hazor may have been thought of as 'the head of all those kingdoms' (Jos 11:10), it would appear that each city-state retained its identity as a 'kingdom.' The landless, deserters and outlaws (known comprehensively as *'apiru*, *habiru* or *hapiru*; see 2.4.2) living outside the cities hindered merchants and couriers in their daily duties and sometimes joined forces to attack the city dwellers (Millard 1973:42-43).

The material remains of value found in buildings and tombs, although displaying declining standards in most crafts, exceed those from the Middle Bronze Age and it is apparent that the superior houses of the aristocracy were well stocked with imported luxuries. Tell el-Ajjul, near Gaza, has revealed hoards of jewellery from the earliest Late Bronze phase, which may

have been buried prior to the first invasion by Thutmosis III (ca 1468 BCE; Millard 1973:43). Numerous, predominantly Egyptian-style artifacts of varying dates (although virtually all of the artistic styles of the era are represented) have been discovered at Megiddo. The cylinder seals, in particular, display a coalescence of Egyptian with Babylonian, combining elements of each as seen, for example, in the seals of a king of Sidon and his son. Trade with Cyprus and the Aegean was evidently brisk, as evidenced by the ubiquitous vessels from these areas; in some tombs their number almost equals that of the local ware. The Amarna letters supply evidence of trade with other areas. Although information about the Canaanite cities of the 13th century remains sparse, it is evident that the glory of many, such as Hazor, had passed and that only the strongest, such as Beth-shan and Megiddo where Egypt's influence could still be felt, were able to resist the settlers in the east (Israelites) and the west (Philistines). This settlement process, however, brought about only relatively minor changes to the material culture of the Canaanites (Millard 1973:43).

## 3.3 CANAANITE RELIGION

The early biblical scholars and some archaeologists, perpetuating biblical biases, assumed that while the religion of the Israelites was 'morally uplifting,' that of the Canaanites was 'decadent' and many treatments of Canaanite religion are marked by an absence of the fundamental 'sympathy' required for insight into any religion. For example, Bright (1972:116-117) has described it as 'an extraordinary debasing form of paganism,' while Kitchen (1982:166) sees it as appealing 'to the bestial and material in human nature.' In Gray's view, in contrast to Israelite morality, 'there was no moral purpose in the fertility cult' and Canaanite 'religion was essentially magical and, as such amoral' (1965:257). Even Roland de Vaux, in his otherwise generally sensitive and well-balanced *magnum opus*, *Ancient Israel: its life and institutions* (1973:288) refers to 'the immoral practices of the Canaanites.' Lemche (1991:171) has gone so far as to argue that the biblical writers 'invented' the Canaanites and, as for their deities, 'no such "gods of Canaan" ever existed,' while Thompson (1999:81) is of the opinion that the biblical name 'Canaanite' is simply 'a literary and fictive term to contrast with biblical Israel;' in addition: 'It is a negative term for

those who worship foreign gods, and especially Ba'al.' As Mark Smith (2002b:19) has put it: 'Clearly, such statements reflected the belief-structures of these scholars as much as, or more than, the beliefs of the authors of the Ugaritic texts.' Fortunately, recent scholarship has overturned the traditional view of Canaanite religion as inferior to Israelite religion. As Rabbi Jacob Neusner, (2007:30) has so rightly pointed out: 'If religion matters, and it does, then it's not honest to be indifferent to the convictions of others.' Nevertheless, knowledge of the religious practices and beliefs in Canaan is far from complete, although a reasonable amount of information has been gleaned from material remains and written documents. Unfortunately, few generalisations can be drawn, since the facts are extremely diverse in nature and provenance and, as Millard (1973:44) has warned, 'it is dangerous to treat the rich data of Ugarit as typically Canaanite.' For example, the Hebrew Bible mentions the 'high places' of the Canaanite cult on numerous occasions, and examples of artificial mounds from Megiddo and elsewhere have been discovered, and yet there is no mention of a cultic 'high place' at Ugarit. Ba'al is 'Lord of the Earth' at Ugarit, while Phoenician sources call him 'Lord of Heaven.' In addition, the city of Ugarit probably lay beyond the boundaries of ancient Canaan (Millard 1973:43-47).

### 3.3.1 The Canaanite Bronze Age pantheon

During the excavations at Ras Shamra (1929-1969), Claude Schaeffer and his colleagues uncovered the remains of Ugarit, a Late Bronze Age, cosmopolitan, metropolis which reached its cultural zenith around 1400 BCE. Although great buildings, private homes, narrow lanes, broad thoroughfares, tombs, ramparts and entrances were uncovered, the most significant discovery proved to be the several thousand clay tablets found in the archives of the ancient city. Many think that the Ugaritic text tablets were purposely and regularly baked after inscription. Pardee (2002:8, n 3) has pointed out that 'this practice was extremely rare, and virtually all the tablets that have come down to us were baked in accidental fires;' most of them were probably baked in the final conflagration that consumed the Late Bronze city of Ugarit. The tablets ($14^{th}$ - $13^{th}$ centuries BCE) are written in a number of different languages: Akkadian, Sumerian, Hurrian, Hittite and Cypro-Minoan; there are also some Hittite and

Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions. The most important from a biblical studies point of view, however, proved to be those in a previously unknown alphabetic cuneiform: Ugaritic, a Northwest Semitic language and a close linguistic relative of biblical Hebrew. The Ugaritic texts are extremely diverse and include administrative texts, census lists, economic texts and letters, as well as those with a more literary, poetic and mythological character (Gray 1965:1-3; Craigie 1983:62,69).

Evidence relating to the religion of Canaan in these texts is fourfold. It is reflected in: (1) the actions of the human heroes in the literary texts; (2) the largely theophoric personal names in the administrative texts; (3) the many gods worshipped and the offerings made in the offering-lists and other ritual texts; and (4) the myths, which give insight into the fertility-cult principles (Gray 1964:121). When using these texts, however, to reconstruct Syro-Palestinian religion and/or interpret biblical references to Canaanite deities, Dearman (1992:42) has pointed out that these texts 'must be interpreted first of all as the material culture of a Late Bronze Age city-state not as the model of a general religion of Syria.' Scholars (eg, J-M de Tarragon, cited by Dearman 1992) have noted discrepancies between the administrative-cultic and the more selective mythic texts and it would appear that a wider variety of religious practices existed than just the ones appearing in the mythic texts. Perhaps, the same holds true with respect to the Israelite cultic practices (ie, there were more religious practices than those actually depicted in the Hebrew Bible). Furthermore, Phoenician, Punic and Aramaic Iron Age texts would be more useful resources. To date, however, the majority of those found date from Iron II (and later) and contain references to variety of pantheons from many different areas. In Dearman's opinion (1992:42-43): 'A discovery of archival and mythic texts from either Tyre or Sidon would likely afford more explicit parallels for the early religion of Israel than the Ugaritic texts.' Nevertheless, the Ugaritic texts are able to provide 'some of the larger background behind the development of Israelite religion' (Smith 2002b:27) and, in my opinion, they are especially useful for shedding light on the 'folk/cult/popular religion' practised during Iron I.

#### *3.3.1.1 El, the head of the pantheon*

In the Ugaritic epics (and, especially, in the Ba'al Epic), the head of the Canaanite pantheon is El (*'el*), whose name literally means 'god' (Albright 1968:119; Van der Toorn 1995:2046). It would appear, however, that El's relative prominence had declined during the second half of the third and the first half of the second millennium and that Ba'al was more prominent in practice. Ba'al is described in the these texts as mating with a heifer; presumably, here, he is in the form of a bull and Gray (1965:158) has pointed out that 'this may be a point at which El and Ba'al were assimilated.' El is portrayed as procreator *par excellence* and is referred to as 'Father of Humanity,' 'Creator of the Earth' (Van der Toorn 1995:2046) and 'the Bull El' (Albright 1968:120), the bull being a common fertility symbol. Although nominally at the top of the pantheon, he behaves as a kindly patriarch and is repeatedly referred to as 'The Kindly One, El, the Merciful,' but seldom figures actively in the pantheon (Gray 1965:160). He is, nevertheless, the final authority in all affairs, both human and divine (Gray 1965:155). In order to visit El, the gods have to journey to a region described as being very remote, called the 'source of the two rivers, the fountain of the two deeps' (Albright 1968:120), that is, 'the common source where the upper and lower waters of the ancient Near Eastern cosmology meet and mingle' (Gray 1964:121).

*3.3.1.2 Athirat, El's consort*

Athirat (sometimes referred to as Elat, the feminine form of El and literally 'goddess;' biblical Asherah) is 'the mother of the gods' and, as such, she joins the qualities of a mother to those of a lover. As a mother, she intercedes with her husband in support of her son Ba'al; as a lover, she attempts to seduce Ba'al (the Storm God), eventually with the consent of El (Van der Toorn 1995:2046). Her name was originally part of a longer appellation, which appears in Ugaritic as *rabbatu 'athiratu yammi* (either, according to Albright (1968:121), 'the Lady who traverses the Sea' or 'the Lady who treads on the Sea (-dragon);' Day (1986:386), however, prefers 'of the Sea,' rather than 'traverses' or 'treads,' since the former 'is more natural'). As demonstrated by some of her epithets she is a fertility goddess: she is called *qaniyatu 'elima* ('Creatress of the Gods'), just as El was called *baniyu binawati* ('Begetter of Creatures'); she is also known as a wet-nurse to the gods, who are frequently referred to as her 'children.' In

an early myth, Athirat destroys the Sea Dragon, making it possible for El to create the earth. Later, either Ba'al or 'Anat, his sister, displace her as the dragon-slayer. Athirat is also known as 'the Lion[15] Lady' (*labi't[u]*) and, at Ugarit, her children are called her 'pride of lions.' One of her most common names is Qudshu ('holiness'), a name that in contemporary Egypt was used for a nude goddess who is depicted on reliefs and amulets, especially during the Ramesside era, *en face*, with spirally curled locks and raised hands holding lilies and serpents, and often astride a lion (Day 1986:389). Athirat appears frequently in the Ba'al Epic, usually as the sworn enemy of Ba'al and his sister 'Anat (Albright 1968:122). She is frequently associated with trees and also appears as a bricklayer (builder) and as the patroness of diviners (cf a 15th century BCE letter found at Ta'anach, addressed by Guli-Adad to the Prince of Ta'anach, which reads, in part: 'Further, and if there is a wizard of Asherah, let him tell our fortunes, and let me hear quickly [?]; and the [oracular] sign and interpretation send to me;' Day 1986:386).

It would appear that Athirat/Asherah was regarded as a mother goddess as far back as at least three centuries prior to the Ugaritic myths (Patai 1965:39; Day 1986:386). In cuneiform texts from the period of the first dynasty of Babylon, (ca 1830-1531 BCE) she is called Ashratum and is the consort of Amurru. In an inscription dedicated to Ashratum on behalf of Hammurabi (ca 1750 BCE) she is described as 'bride of the king of heaven' and 'mistress of sexual vigour and rejoicing.' Abdu-Ashirta, 'servant of Ashirta' (Asherah), is mentioned as a king of the Amorites in the Amarna tablets (14th century BCE), while the names Asherah and Astarte are used interchangeably perhaps indicating 'a lack of clear distinction between the functions and personalities of these two goddesses' (Patai 1965:39).

15 The association of the mother (fertility) goddess and lions appears to be common throughout the ancient Near East. Neolithic sites (8th and 7th millennia BCE) in Anatolia (eg, Catal Huyuk and Hacilar) have yielded pottery and stone figurines depicting a mother goddess accompanied by a pair of lions (and occasionally tigers; Stern 2006:179). In the 2nd millennium, she was called Kubaba by the Hittites and in the 1st millennium she was known as Cybele, the chief goddess of the central Anatolian kingdoms, especially Phrygia. A pottery figurine (15cm high; late Persian to early Hellenistic) found in Area D1 in the southwestern part of Tel Dor during the final season of excavations (1980-2000) depicts the goddess Cybele, with a lion on each side of her throne (Stern 2006:179). Her cult also spread to Lydia and the Mediterranean coast and was eventually accepted by the Greeks and, later, the Romans, and her cult became an established religion in Rome in 204 CE.

*3.3.1.3 Ba‘al*

Ba‘al (*ba‘al*; ‘lord’ or ‘the lord’), who is called the ‘son of Dagan’ in the mythological texts (Gray 1964:122), is the most important active figure in the Canaanite pantheon. The general theme of the Ba‘al-mythology is the Kingship of Ba‘al and his character as king is dynamic rather than static (cf the kingship of El). He is king of both heaven and earth and is obliged to constantly fight for his royal status. He is also the fertility-god *par excellence,* primarily as the god of winter storms and rain and, secondarily, in the vegetation thereby promoted (Albright 1968:124-125; Gray 1965:166). Dagan (later changed to ‘Dagon’ during the Phoenician era; Albright 1968:186) was originally a god of fertility, worshipped from the earliest times in the Euphrates Valley and, although the ‘Dagan’ and ‘Ba‘al’ temples at Ugarit are of the same size, Dagan makes no further appearance in Canaanite mythology and is known only though theophoric names and offering-lists; he is, however, mentioned twice on votive inscriptions as the god of vegetation, specifically corn (Gray 1964:122; 1965:179; Van der Toorn 1995:2046). Ba‘al’s personal name is usually Hadad (the storm god; or Teshub, the Hurrian equivalent), which appears in various shortened forms and many different spellings and he was also the patron of the reigning dynasty. He had both a palace or temple in heaven and a terrestrial home, the latter being on Mount Saphon (Mt. Kasios of the Greek geographers; modern Jebel el-‘Aqra, the conspicuous mountain (more than 1500m high) about 75km north of Ras Shamra; Gray 1964:122; 1965:167; Pardee 2002:277). He is, thus, also known as Ba‘al-Saphon. Other favourite titles include ‘Triumphant Ba‘al,’ ‘Cloud Rider’ and ‘Majesty, Lord of Earth.’ He is said to have struggled with the god of death, drought and sterility (Mot), who conquered him and took him down to the underworld (see 3.3.5). He was rescued from the underworld by his sister and consort, ‘Anat, who slew Mot after a violent conflict (Albright 1968:125-126; Gray 1965:174).

*3.3.1.4 ‘Anat*

Ba‘al is associated with two goddesses. The first is ‘Anat (Anath), his virgin sister and

consort, who has clear associations with fertility[16] and war in both Ugarit and Egypt. Although one of the younger deities, in the agricultural ritual and mythology of Ras Shamra she is the most active goddess and is referred to as 'the strength of life' and is a deity 'who kills and makes alive again' (Gray 1965:174). She is, in many ways, similar to the Mesopotamian Ishtar and is depicted as a young maiden, swift as a bird and fierce as a lioness (Van der Toorn 1995:2046). Her name is probably an abbreviation of *'anat-pane-ba'al* (perhaps 'turning of Ba'al's face'; ie, 'wrath of Ba'al'; Albright 1968:134). As Queen of Heaven, she bore such epithets as 'Mistress of Kingship,' 'Mistress of Dominion' and 'Mistress of the High Heavens.' She also delighted in slaughtering humanity from 'the rising of the sun' to 'the shore of the sea' - a massacre over which 'her heart rejoiced and her liver exulted.' In addition, 'Anat was the patroness of the human ruler and, according to one theme of the royal ideology, she was the wet nurse of the king (Albright 1968:130; Van der Toorn 1995:2046).

*3.3.1.5 Astarte*

The second goddess associated with Ba'al is Ashtarte/Astarte/'Athtart (biblical Ashtaroth/Ashtoreth and Babylonian Ishtar), a fertilty goddess with the full name *'ashtart-shem-ba'al* ('Splendour of the name of Ba'al'). She is apparently also a sister and consort of Ba'al, but is little more than a supporting figure in the epics and appears only rarely (her name appears in offering-lists; she is, however, more conspicuous in later Phoenician inscriptions; Albright 1968:134; Gray 1965:175-176). As a fertility goddess, she plays the role of divine courtesan and she is characterized as a goddess of sexual love. Although her associations with

16 It should be noted that the nature of 'Anat, especially with regard to her fertility connections, is currently being reevaluated. Lewis (1996:118), for example, has pointed out that in a new reading of the cuneiform wedges in an epigraphically useful photograph of KTU 1.96 (one of the more colourful texts describing part of 'Anat's character) taken in Damascus in 1995, using side-lighting, the name 'Anat (*'nt*) disappears from the text 'as does the certainty of three and a half decades of scholarly reconstructions about the cannibalistic nature of the goddess. KTU 1.96 can no longer be used as *definitive* proof that 'Anat is either a cannibal or a mistress of fertility.' In place of her name, the text reads *'nn*. G del Olmo Lete (1992), according to Lewis, has suggested 'that 1.96 is an incantation against the evil eye (*'n*) with the second *n* of *'nn* denoting some type of determinative similar to the *-n* affix used in certain magic texts' - a theory which Lewis finds 'quite appealing.'

war are generally not as well known, she acts as a war goddess in concert with Horan in Ugaritic mythology. She features more prominently in Egypt as a goddess of fertility, as well as war, with both second and first millennia texts describing her as a war goddess (Albright 1968:133).

*3.3.1.6 Other figures in the pantheon*

Other figures of the epic pantheon include: Koshar/Kothar (full name: Kothar-and-Khasis; 'the very skilful and intelligent one'), the patron of all forms of craftsmanship (everything from construction to metallurgy, magic and music); his female counterpart, Koshart(u), the goddess of childbirth (Albright 1968:135-138); Horan/Hauron, who appears only rarely in the Ba'al Epic, but always with Astarte as the military champion of Ba'al; and Resheph, a god of the underworld, a god of pestilence and destruction, of death and war. Resheph, too, appears only rarely in the Ugaritic texts, but when he does he is either the sender of pestilence or 'the lord of good fortune' (*b'l hz*; cf *hs*, 'Resheph of good fortune,' in Phoenician inscriptions from Cyprus a thousand years later; Albright 1968:138-139).

**3.3.2 The Canaanite pantheon and the Hebrew Bible**

It should be noted, at the outset, that not all scholars are convinced that the Ugaritic texts are able to shed light on early Israelite religion. Whilst admitting the importance of these texts for the history of the Near East in general in the second millennium BCE, Morton Smith (1952:135), for example, has cautioned against their relevance for understanding the Hebrew Bible, the bulk of which dates from about the middle of the first millennium. In his view, any relevance is, at best, indirect and incidental. Although there are 'a few traces of Ugaritic mythology' in biblical poetry, he is of the opinion that 'the striking fact is the rarity of such references, and when they do occur they are pieces of poetic imagery, probably of no religious significance.' The 'poetic jargon' which the texts have in common is best explained 'by the common linguistic and cultural background of that poetry,' since it occurs in most ancient

Semitic poetry (Smith 1952:136) - a sentiment echoed by Millard (1973:47). Nevertheless, I feel that if the majority of the settlers originated from the indigenous Canaanite population, the Ugaritic texts are significant for understanding 'folk/cult religion.'

*3.3.2.1 El, Ba'al and Yahweh*

El, as one of two names for God (the other being Yahweh), appears in the oldest traditions in the Hebrew Bible. This is especially apparent in the primitive name formulae in the patriarchal narratives (eg, El-'olam, ('the Everlasting God;' Gn 21:33); El-shadday (the most frequent of the biblical epithets under consideration; 'God Almighty;' eg, Gn 28:3; 35:11; 43:14); El-'elohe-Israel ('El, the God of Israel;' Gn 33:2)). El is also often used in the plural form (ie, Elohim; eg, in the Creation story (Gn 1:1ff)) in order 'to denote plenitude of might' (Hertz 1960:2).

FM Cross and his students have listed numerous parallels between Yahweh and El. Many of the traits and functions of El, the creator of heaven and earth, and father of all, appear as traits and functions of Yahweh in the earliest traditions of Israel, especially that of Yahweh as creator and father. Cross (1973:182) has pointed out, for example, the many parallels which exist between the functions and modes of manifestation of El in the 'Aqhat and Keret Epics, and in the Patriarchal sagas of Genesis. El blesses Danil (in the 'Aqhat Epic) and Keret (Kirta), while in dreams or visitations by messenger, or by El himself, both Danil and Keret learn that they are to have offspring. The god of Abraham blesses Abraham (Gn 12:1-3); Abraham is called the blessed of El 'elyon ('God Most High;' Gn 14:18 ff); and it is revealed to Abraham that Sarah will be blessed and bear a son (Gn 17:15-16). Even such details as the Tabernacle and its appurtenances reflect Canaanite models, specifically the Tent of El and his cherubim throne (1973:72).

In addition to elaborating on the relationships and continuities between El and his mythology and Yahweh, the god of Israel's deliverance, Cross (1973:147) has shown that Yahwism also owes debts to the myths of Ba'al. Amongst others, he shows that the language used in the earliest poetic sources depicting Yahweh as divine warrior manifest (eg, Jdg 5:4,5) is borrowed almost directly from Canaanite descriptions of the theophany of Ba'al as storm god.

Even the later prophetic sources tend to retain remnants of Canaanite imagery; Yahweh is, for example, depicted by Isaiah (19:1) as 'riding on a swift cloud' (cf Ba'al's title 'Cloud Rider') and is described subduing the sea creatures - a description which parallels those in the Ba'al cycle (eg, Hab 3:8-11; Ps 74:13-15; 104:24-29; Hillel 2006:167).

Personal names formed using the theophoric elements Ba'al, Adad and 'Adon appear in the Amarna correspondence, suggesting that deities with these names/titles were venerated in the Syro-Palestinian city-states (Dearman 1992:43). Although absent from the ancestral accounts in Genesis, place names with the theophoric element Ba'al appear in the Hebrew Bible (eg, Ba'al-gad (Jos 11:17; 12:7; 13:5); Ba'al-hamon (Can 8:11) and Ba'al-hermon (Jdg 3:3; 1 Chr 5:23)), while the theophoric element *'el* also appears in place names (eg, Bethel (Gn 12:8; 28:19) and Peniel or Penuel (Gn 32:30-31)), as well as in the personal name Israel. It is interesting to note, however, that neither the Amarna texts, nor the Egyptian topographical lists from the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages, contain any place names with the theophoric element Ba'al (Dearman 1992:43-44).

*3.3.2.2. 'Anat*

'Anat, unlike the two other great goddesses of Canaan (Asherah and Astarte) is not known as a goddess in the Hebrew Bible. However, the theophoric element '*nt* occurs in several place names such as Anathoth (Jos 21:18; 1 Ki 2:26; 1 Chr 6:45; etc), Beth-Anath ('House of 'Anat;' Jos 19:38; Jdg 1:33) and Beth-Anoth (Jos 15:59). It is also to be found in a few personal names, the most famous of which being Shamgar Ben-Anath ('Son of 'Anat;' Jdg 3:31; 5:6). While the identification is most probably intended to relate Shamgar to the town of Beth-Anath in Galilee, Boling (1975:89) has suggested that 'the label *bn-'nt* may be merely a military designation' derived from the warrior goddess 'Anat. Other *'nt* names are Anathoth (1 Chr 7:8; Neh 10:20) and Anthothiyah (1 Chr 8:24; Gray 1965:175; Ackerman 1992:19, n 53, n 54).

*3.3.2.3 Asherah*

Despite the anti-polytheistic attitude of the biblical authors and editors which resulted in a pronounced reluctance to allow any detail of pagan worship to enter their references to Israel's religious transgressions, the Hebrew Bible is able to supply some information about popular religion. There are about forty references to *'asherah* in the Hebrew Bible, several of which are possible or certain references to a goddess Asherah. Asa is said to have removed his mother, Ma'acah, from the position of queen mother because 'she had an abominable image [presumably an idol] made for Asherah' (1 Ki 15:13). In the account of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al on Mt. Carmel, there is reference to 'the four hundred prophets of Asherah' (1 Ki 18:19). Even in the temple in Jerusalem, furnishings ('hangings') were in use for Asherah (see 2 Ki 23:7). Presumably, these refer to the Canaanite goddess herself. Asherah's epithet *'elat* ('goddess'), the feminine form of *'el* ('god') known both from Ugaritic and Phoenician material, does not occur in the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of the place name Elat (Ackerman 1992:190).

More often, however, in the Deuteronomistic passages the term refers not to a goddess but to a cultic object or installation of some kind. The Asherah, along with the *massebah* ('standing stone') was associated with a shrine or temple and it was an illicit object which was either installed or used by some kings, who were condemned (eg, Ahab; 1 Ki 16:33), or destroyed by others, who were praised (eg, Hezekiah; 2 Ki 18:3-4). Unfortunately, the biblical texts do not reveal its precise nature. The primary meaning of the Akkadian word *ashirtu* is 'sanctuary' or 'temple' and there is some Phoenician textual evidence to support the fact that the Asherim at Ma'sub (3$^{rd}$ century BCE) and Acco (early Persian period) were sanctuaries of some kind (McCarter 1987:145-146). This raises the possibility that the Israelite-Canaanite Asherah might also have been a sanctuary. However, the biblical references make it clear that the Asherah was not a sanctuary; rather it was an object that constituted part of a shrine (whether a high place (eg, Dt 18:14) or a temple (eg, 1 Ki 16:33)) and it was associated with a *massebah* and other cultic paraphernalia such as altars and images. Deuteronomy 7:5, for example, tells us that after entering Canaan, the Israelites were instructed to 'break down [the

inhabitant's] altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.' The Asherah apparently stood beside the altar (eg, Gideon's father's Asherah was beside the altar of Ba'al (Jdg 6:25,28,30)) and its nature is hinted at by the language used to describe the installation or destruction of an Asherah; it was 'planted' (Dt 16:21) and then 'remained standing' (Is 27:9) until it was 'cut down' (Ex 34:13), 'hewn down' (Dt 7:5) or 'burned' (2 Ki 23:4,6,15). It was clearly wooden, since Gideon was instructed to destroy his father's altar of Ba'al and 'cut down the Asherah that is beside it' (Jdg 6:25) and then told to prepare a whole burnt offering to Yahweh 'with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down' (Jdg 6:26). The fact that a wooden cult object was used to symbolised a goddess would not appear to have been an unusual practice in the ancient Near East. Philo of Byblos, for example, tells us that the Phoenicians 'consecrated pillars and staves, after their names [of their gods]' (Eusebius *Praep. ev*. 1.10.11, cited by Day 1986:404).

It would appear that, although belonging to Gideon's father, Joash the Abiezrite, the wooden representation of Asherah ('the Asherah') and 'the altar of Ba'al' (Jdg 6:25) were sacred objects used by the entire village, since after Gideon had cut down the Asherah and demolished Ba'al's altar, the villagers demanded that Gideon be put to death (Jdg 6:30). Patai (1965:40) has pointed out that the image and the altar were viewed quite differently: the altar did not represent the god, but was merely an altar dedicated to him; the wooden image, by comparison, '*was* Asherah, it represented her in the manner in which a statue of an Egyptian or a Greek goddess represented that deity' and it was therefore probably fashioned in some manner to clearly indicate that it stood for her. The fact that even during the period of the Divided Monarchy, repeated derogatory references were made to her cult would suggest that the cult of Asherah had endured throughout the monarchic period (Patai 1965:40).

In the biblical tradition (and in the ancient Near East, in general), the term *'asherah* is frequently associated with sacred trees (see, eg, Dt 16:21) and in the Septuagint it is usually translated as *alsos*, 'grove, sacred grove' (Ackerman 1992:189). In the Authorized Version, the Asherah (2 Ki 23:4,6) for which the women wove 'hangings' (2 Ki 23:7) is also translated as 'the grove' (Gray 1965:176). Biblical passages, however, suggest that the cult object was made by human hands; both Ahab (1 Ki 16:33) and Manasseh (2 Ki 21:3) are said to have 'made' an Asherah. The expression to 'set up' (2 Ki 17:10) or even to 'build' (1 Ki 14:23) an

Asherah points in the same direction. Many scholars believe the Asherah to have been a simple wooden staff or pole, a stylized tree or, perhaps, a carved image of a goddess. Using several archaeological discoveries (all, however, postdating the 'period of the Judges'), Dever (1984:21) has gone further and proposed that, 'at least in some circles in ancient Israel,' Asherah was revered as the consort of Yahweh. For example, two large *pithoi* ($9^{th}$ - $8^{th}$ century BCE) from an Israelite-Judean caravanserai with an attached shrine at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teiman, in the eastern Sinai), with Hebrew blessing formulae and cultic (?) scenes, both refer to 'Yahweh and his Asherah,' while a similar reference occurs in a Khirbet el-Qom (biblical Makkedeh) funerary inscription (No III; line 3) found in an $8^{th}$ century context in Judah (Dever 1984:21-22).

*3.3.2.4 Ashtaroth, Dagan and Horan*

In the Book of Judges, Ashtaroth makes several appearances (2:13; 10:6; 3:7; the latter reads Asheroth, due to 'textual confusion' (Ackerman 1992:24)). In biblical Hebrew, the noun *'ashtarot* (which is derived from the divine name *'ashtart*) means 'increase, progeny,' again reflecting Astarte's role as a fertility goddess (Ackerman 1992:24). Her propensity for war is possibly reflected in 1 Samuel 31:10, where it is said that the Philistines hung up the armour of Saul in her temple ('the temple of Ashtaroth;' presumably the 'Northern Temple of Ramesses III' at Beth-shan) as a trophy of their victory at Mt. Gilboa (Rowe 1940:31).

Dagan (Dagon) and Horon are attested in the place-names Beth-dagon (Jos 15:41; 19:27) and Beth-horon (eg, Jos 10:10,11) and the former is said to have had a temple and cult at Ashdod (1 Sm 5:1-7).

*3.3.2.5 Local manifestations of the gods*

The personality of each god apparently assumed a local character. For example, there was an 'Asherah of Tyre' and an 'Asherah of Sidon;' in Tyre, the chief god was Ba'al-Melqart, in Sidon, Ba'al-Eshmun, and in Carthage, Ba'al-Hamon (cf Ishtar of Arbela, Nineveh, Bit

Kimori, etc and today's Virgins of Fatima and Guadalupe). Thus, when we read in the Hebrew Bible that the Israelites served the Ba'als and the Asherahs (Asheroth/Asherim; eg, Jdg 3:7) presumably, in each locality, they were venerating the local version of the god (Patai 1965:39-40; Dearman 1992:41; Stern 2006:177).

In the Jephthah story, when referring to the god of Ammon, Jephthah calls him Chemosh (the god of Moab) and not Molech or Milcom as one would have expected (Jdg 11:24). Patai (1965:44-45) has suggested that the name Molech/Milcom, by which the Ammonites usually referred to their god, was not his proper name but an epithet meaning simply 'king' (Hebrew: *melekh*; cf Hadad, who was usually referred to or addressed by his epithet Ba'al ('lord')) and that it would have been 'the correct language of international diplomacy to name the god of Ammon by his proper name in exact parallelism to the proper name of the god of Israel, Yahweh.' Patai has also suggested that 'the Molech' (ie 'the King') of the east-Jordanian countries and 'the Ba'al' (ie 'the Lord') of Phoenicia were identical and the epithets were those belonging to the local manifestations of the god. In other words, the cults of the Ammonite Molech/Milcom and the Moabite Chemosh were nothing more than Ba'al cults. In the case of Molech, this is supported by the fact that the Hebrew Bible mentions the name Ba'alis as being that of an Ammonite king (Jr 40:14).

### 3.3.3 Ritual and cult at Ugarit

In his examination of the Ugaritic texts dealing with the everyday contacts between the Ugaritians and their deities, Pardee (2002:3) has concluded that bloody sacrifice is the *sine qua non* of the Ugaritic cult. Virtually every cultic act prescribed in the prose texts dealing with daily religious practice, 'is preceded by, accompanied by, or followed by, one or more sacrifices.' Most of the offerings refer to ovids/caprids (33%); these are followed by bovids (15%), birds (3%) and then animal body parts (3%). Other categories include garments/textiles (19%), vegetal products (6%), precious metals (2%), various implements (<1%) and donkeys (<1%); the balance are unidentifiable objects (Pardee 2002:225). Male animals were generally offered more frequently; however, female animals were more commonly offered as holocaust offerings, rather than peace-offerings. Liquids (eg, oil and

wine) would appear to have been offered fairly frequently; there is, however, 'only one reasonably clear reference to a libation offering, that of oil' (Pardee 2002:226). Presumably, the textile products were used to clothe cult statues and that these garments were changed fairly frequently or, perhaps, these textiles were simply used to make clothing for the priests. Animal sacrifices and vegetal offering were most likely considered as food for the gods, in keeping with many ancient sacrificial systems (eg, those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and ancient Greece; Pardee 2002:226).

Non-sacrificial acts are also prescribed in these texts and include offerings intended as permanent possessions for the deity (eg, an inscribed votive offering consisting of a lion-headed vase), cultic processions, prayer and song (Pardee 2002:226-227). One of 'The Duties of an Ideal Son' (which is part of the 'Aqhat Epic; CTA 17.1.26-34) was 'setting up the stela of one's divine ancestor' - a duty which seems to be illustrated by the Dagan Stelae, which are most likely to be mortuary in nature. These stelae commemorate the offering of a sheep and an ox to Dagan-PGR (Lewis 1986:112,122,270).

Divinatory practices are mainly concerned with extispicy, especially hepatoscopy (the examination of the liver from an animal that had been sacrificed specifically in order to examine its internal organs). This 'science' is well-known from Mesopotamia, where manuals and instructional model livers have been discovered. The manuals from Ugarit, however, deal with a broader range of divinatory practices, from malformed human and animal births to dreams (Pardee 2002:229).

In addition to sacrifice, prayer and song, the mythological and para-mythological texts give some evidence for the existence of cultic theatre. However, whether or not this practice included the theatrical re-enactment of any of the mythological themes as a regular part of the royal cult is not evident. Cultic theatre is not mentioned in the ritual texts (Pardee 2002:232).

Very little or no information is provided for such aspects of Ugaritic religious practice such as liturgy (ie, the precise form of each cultic act, such as the feeding and care of the divinities), economy (the apportioning of the offerings), politics/society (since virtually all the rites are described with reference to the royal cult, the form of the non-royal cult and the role of the priests in the royal/non-royal cult is unclear), and theology (the meanings ascribed to the acts by the Ugaritians themselves, whether royal or non-royal). Even when extrapolated from other

ancient Near Eastern cultures, any conclusions would be little more than generalities (Pardee 2002:232).

### 3.3.4 Ritual and cult in the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible: similarities and differences

According to Pardee (2002:233-241), some of the most significant similarities and differences include the following:

#### *3.3.4.1 Similarities*

Several terms in both corpora are related etymologically (eg, those used for 'sacrifice' and 'peace-offering'). It should be pointed out, however, that one cannot assume that 'practice and ideology were the same;' in addition, several other terms 'have no certain correspondence' (Pardee 2002:233). Neither dogs nor pigs were sacrificed in either society; nor wild animals. Although both refer to perfumed oil, the Hebrew Bible is explicit about its usage (ie, to be burnt in lamps); the Ugaritic texts, by contrast, do not make the destination clear (ie, whether or not it was used primarily for anointing; Pardee 2002:234). The requirements for bodily purity are similar, although in the Ugaritic texts they are explicitly stated only for the king. Much of the vocabulary used for basic architectural structures is similar (eg, *bt* 'the temple of ...' and *qdsh* 'sanctuary); there are, however, many differences. Although the Ugaritic *marzihu* had a patron deity, neither it nor the Hebrew *marzeah* were primarily cultic institutions (neither Amos (Am 6:7) nor Jeremiah (Jr 16:5) condemned it as a place of false worship; they simply condemned some of the associated behaviour), neither was it held to provide sexual activities for the participants. These were, in fact social institutions

which functioned as drinking societies[17] for a limited number of male members (Pardee 2002:234).

It should also be pointed out, that both the Israelites and the Canaanites, made and paid vows, usually by means of money or offerings (Gray 1964:125-126; Van der Toorn 1995:2056). In the Keret Epic, Keret promises an amount of silver and gold equal to the weight of his future spouse; Jacob pledges to repay a tenth of everything that God gives to him (Gn 28:22). The Ugaritic texts do not, however, mention human sacrifice (cf Jephthah's daughter (Jdg 11:30-31; 34ff) and those practised by the Phoenicians during the Iron Age). Guidance from the supernatural was also expected by both Canaanites and Israelites. In a rather incomplete, small tablet from Ugarit, Ditanu (using a similar vocabulary to that used in Nm 27:21) interrogates the Master of the Great Gods (possibly El) about the birth of a future child (De Tarragon 1995:2073).

*3.3.4.2 Differences*

While the Hebrew Bible permits very few alternative names for the deity (these are, in any event, epithets rather than distinct divinities), Pardee (2002:222,235-236) has found reference to 234 different Ugaritic deities. Although the date of the inception of monotheism is uncertain, in contrast to Ugaritic polytheism, only traces of polytheism are to be found in the Hebrew Bible; most references were probably removed during editing. The two corpora share superficial literary similarities; there are, however, significant differences. For example, while some of the Psalms and Ugaritic poetic texts show formal similarities, their mythological and

17 As a pharmacist, I was fascinated to find the following recipe for a hangover in *'Ilu's* (El's) *Marzihu* (RS 24.258; lines 28-31; Pardee 2002:167-168):

> 'When she would heal him, he awakes
> What is to be put on his forehead: hairs of a dog
> And the head of the PQQ and its shoot
> he is to drink mixed together with fresh olive oil'

'She' is either *'Anatu* ('Anat) or *'Attartu* (Astarte); PQQ is plausibly identified as a plant (Pardee 2002:186, n 12). 'Hairs of a dog'? - there *really* is 'nothing new under the sun' (cf 'hair of the dog,' the more modern English expression for an ineffective cure for a hangover; ie, a further drink to 'cure' the effects of alcohol)!

narrative themes are very different (Pardee 2002:235).

As has been pointed out, certain of the principal sacrificial terms are similar or identical in both corpora; others, however, are quite different (eg, mortuary sacrifice), while certain rites (eg, the Ugaritic 'contemplation' and 'entry' rites) have no explicit parallels in the biblical texts (Pardee 2002:236-237). In addition, the preoccupation with sin and cleansing therefrom, so characteristic of the Hebrew texts, is not apparent in the Ugaritic texts. The great importance attached to the blood and fat of sacrificial animals in the Hebrew Bible does not feature in the Ugaritic texts. Certain sacrificial animal organs (eg, the 'heart,' the 'kidneys/loins' and the 'snout'), as well as the sacrifice of a donkey, are absent from the biblical texts. The regular offerings of textiles, presumably to clothe either the cult deities or the priests, or both, so characteristic of the Ugaritic texts is not part of the approved biblical system (see, eg, 2 Ki 23:7). Specific reference to incense is absent from the Ugaritic texts, while certain architectural terms ( eg, 'the mound (-room)' (*gb*) and 'the opening' ('*urbt*)) do not appear in the biblical texts. In contrast to the unbroken sequence of seven-day weeks characteristic of the biblical legislation, the Ugaritic cult calendar was purely lunar (Pardee 2002:238).

### 3.3.5 The Ugaritic Ba'al Epic, the fertility of the land and climate fluctuations

The people of the ancient Near East visualised the universe as consisting of three tiers: heaven, the domain of the gods; the land, where the people, the animals and the means for life to exist (eg, the crops) were located; and the underworld, the domain of the dead and the deities 'who presided over their attenuated existence' (Toombs 1983:616). One of the major motifs in the protracted struggle between Ba'al and Mot is the fertility of the middle tier, the domain of a land-based people with an agricultural economy (Toombs 1983:614-619). Ba'al (Life), whose most important attribute was his ability to make the land fertile with his life-giving rain, endeavoured to become a benevolent ruler under whom humanity would prosper. He, thus, challenged Mot (Death), with the view to cancelling out his power of death over the earth. Mot, however, had other plans. As the lord of the underworld, he had a voracious appetite and was a swallower *par excellence*. Anyone who approached him was in jeopardy.

In the absence of victims, he was able to reach into the middle tier of the universe and devour the mortals, the animals and even dry up the vegetation needed for their existence. Accordingly, Mot decided to respond to Ba‘al’s challenge. His plan was to swallow Ba‘al, imprison him in the underworld and render him powerless; in turn, Mot would become the ruler of the earth. During the ensuing struggle, Ba‘al was almost extinguished by Mot, but he ultimately triumphed to rule over nature and humanity. The outcome of the contest was not decisive, however, and each participant was required to periodically relinquish his supremacy. This resulted in ‘cyclic patterns:’ birth - growth - death for humans and animals; sowing of seeds - maturity - harvest - death for crops; fertility - death ‘for the earth as a whole’ (Toombs 1983:619). According to the myth, each cycle lasted for a period of seven years.

Ba‘al’s most valuable ally and one who shared in both his victories and defeats, was ‘Anat the warrior goddess, Ba‘al’s sister and consort. She also represented the female powers of fertility - not only the fertility of the soil, but also that of humanity - and together they operated as ‘an indissoluble unity.’ Toombs (1983:620) sees this alliance as ‘a mythological statement of the conviction that the activities of the male and female fertility principles are synchronized with one another.’

The sun deity, Shapash (*shpsh*), who divided her time between the domains of both day and night, acted in concert with Ba‘al and Mot. Ba‘al possessed the power to bring rain; without him her searing rays would destroy earth, making her a creature of Mot. She, therefore, volunteered to travel each night to the underworld so as to ensure the necessary rains, as well as the heat and light during the day, required to sustain human life. The other elements which ensured the fertility of the land (eg, dew, mist, the wells and springs, the deities of the vineyards and irrigated fields) were either Ba‘al’s daughters (or brides) or his messengers (Toombs 1983:620-621).

Periods of fertility would presumably have been interpreted by the Late Bronze Ugaritians as those in which Ba‘al had the upper hand; periods of drought - especially a protracted drought, which would have put the community’s existence in jeopardy - on the other hand, obviously meant that the dominant deity was Mot. ‘It is not at all surprising that the religion which the epic represents proved so stubborn, and, one is tempted to say, so worthy an antagonist of Israel’s religion’ (Toombs 1983:622).

### 3.3.6 The persistence of Canaanite religion

#### *3.3.6.1 Early developments in Canaanite religion*

It is quite possible that conceptions of the pantheon would have continued to develop (cf the apparent evolution in Ugaritic Canaanite religion where El, the earlier monocratic head of the pantheon, was superceded by Ba'al; subsequently, in the Iron Age and Persian period, the principal goddess in Phoenicia and the Levant (including Palestine) was no longer Asherah, but Astarte, who now encompassed the older role of 'Anat; Oden 1976:31; Dever 1984:29). That 'Anat was identified as the 'Lion Lady' in Iron Age I (just as Athirat/Asherah had been in the LBA) is confirmed by a hoard of arrowheads discovered in 1953 by a farmer at el-Khadr, a village about 5km west of Bethlehem (Milik & Cross 1954:5-6). The hoard included 26 uninscribed and three inscribed bronze arrowheads[18] (late 12th century BCE), bearing the identical inscriptions *hs* (arrowhead) and *'bdlb't* (*'abdlabi't*; 'Servant of the Lion Lady;' a personal name which is well attested epigraphically). Milik and Cross (1954:8) had already suggested at that stage that these inscriptions preserved an old epithet of one of the three chief Canaanite goddesses: Athirat, 'Anat or Astarte - a suggestion which was confirmed by the later discovery of an arrowhead from the same hoard dedicated to the 'Lion Lady' (obverse) and bearing the patronymic 'Bin 'Anat' (reverse; Cross 1980:4,6-7).

Several scholars (eg, Frank M Cross in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (1973)) have, however, stressed that the basic shape of the religion as illuminated by the Ugaritic texts

18 Iwry (1961:28) believes that these inscribed arrowheads 'were used for divination or drawing lots by means of arrows.' This practice was widespread in antiquity and could be used for a number of different purposes (eg, to predict the fate of an impending campaign or a business transaction, for settling disputes, for dividing spoils and property, etc) and it is alluded to in early documents from Mesopotamia, mentioned in the Nuzi texts, in the Hebrew Bible and even in the later pre-Islamic lore. While predicting the imminent fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel (Ezk 21:21) is said to have visualised the king of Babylon as standing 'at the parting of the ways,' ready 'to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim, he looks at the liver' in order to determine whether 'Rabbah of the Ammonites' or Jerusalem should be the target of his invasion. Iwry (1961:30) is also of the opinion that the *hs* inscribed on the arrows 'may well be identified with the Arabic *hazz*, meaning "lot, portion, good luck, fortune, chance."' Boling (1975:54) has suggested that arrows with arrowheads such as those from el-Khadr may have been used to answer questions posed, for example, in Judges 1:1.

persisted into later times. The continued vitality of the deities is, however, often disguised by a shifting usage of epithets and by linguistic changes in the deities' names. For example, a Cypriot text from the 4th century BCE identifies 'Anat with Greek Athena, while many stelae from the Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean are dedicated to Tannit, a goddess who is most plausibly identified as Asherah (Oden 1976:32).

Prior to the 1970s, Tannit appeared to have been unique to the Phoenician-Punic colonies in the western Mediterranean (where she was worshipped as the consort of Ba'al-Hamon); her name is attested in hundreds of signs and inscriptions reading 'The great lady, Tannit, Panei Ba'al' ('Face of Ba'al') discovered mainly in Carthage, but also in other North African cities, Sicily, Sardinia, Malta and Spain (Stern 2006:177). One of the Carthage inscriptions discovered in the early 1970s, however, reads 'To our lady Astarte and Tannit in Lebanon.' Since then, several pottery figurines from shipwrecks off the coast, near Tyre and Shavei Zion, and lead weights, seals and bullae from excavations all along the Phoenician coast, from Byblos to Ashkelon have been recovered; all bear the sign of Tannit. Ashkelon has also yielded stone and metal pendants from the Persian period which bear her sign. That Tannit is identified with Astarte (Asherah) is confirmed by an inscription from Temple 1 (7th century BCE) at Sarepta (biblical Zarephath; midway between Tyre and Sidon) which reads 'Tannit Ashtoreth' (Stern 2006:178).

Some commentators (eg, Albright and Cross) have 'long pointed out an extraordinary, almost bewildering fluidity in the conception of many Northwest Semitic deities, seen in the overlap in their roles, their tendency to coalesce and split off, and even their ability to combine opposites' (Dever 1984:28). Cross (1973:49), for example, sees the *'elim* of the Canaanite pantheon not as 'local *numina*,' but as cosmic deities who could, however, appear in local manifestations in certain cult places and with special titles, attributes, or hypostases. The goddesses at Ugarit each had a distinctive identity; however, they also shared attributes and titles: Athirat (Asherah), the goddess of fertility; Astarte, the goddess of fertility and sexual love; and 'Anat, the goddess of fertility and war). 'Anat, for example, was both consort and sister to Ba'al, a mother figure as well as a perpetual virgin. While it is possible that the ancients were less 'logical' that their modern counterparts, Dever (1984:28) has suggested that perhaps 'individual deities could be regarded as hypostases of the universal deity' and that Asherah, 'Anat and Astarte would therefore have all been personifications of some aspect(s) of the great

"Mother Goddess."' The Hebrew Bible does, after all, refer to the Asherim/Asheroth (ie, in the plural; eg, Dt 7:5 and Jdg 3:7); in addition, the Late Bronze Age Syro-Palestinian deities were easily adopted by/identified with local deities in New Kingdom Egypt.

The dominant feature of a painted Egyptian limestone relief (probably dating to the time of Ramesses III) from a small collection of Egyptian antiquities which had been presented to Winchester College, in 1951, by Captain CJ Astley Maberley (the original provenance is unclear), is a goddess (painted yellow) standing on a lion (Edwards 1955:49-51). Other than a headdress, a collar, black bands crossing her chest, a black girdle and bracelets, she is depicted in the nude. Her right hand holds a single blue lotus with a long, red stem, while her left holds a black serpent. Her identity is confirmed as 'Qudhsu-Astarte-'Anat' by the two columns of black hieroglyphs painted vertically on each side of her body. This three-fold syncretism which, until then, had not been demonstrated, presumably developed in Egypt, since no mention of this triune goddess has so far come to light in the Ugaritic texts. In Egyptian texts, Astarte and 'Anat are characterised as goddesses of war and are usually described as the daughters of Re, although Astarte in the 'Legend of Astarte' is called the daughter of Ptah. Since both are also associated 'with sensuousness and self-indulgence,' Edwards (1955:51) has suggested that 'perhaps it was those traits which led to her association with Qudshu.'

An incantation text from *Ugaritica V*, as well as an Egyptian text refer to 'Anat-and-Ashtart (*'ntw'trt*; ie, with no word divider), while an unpublished Phoenician inscription is dedicated not only to Asherah/Tannit, but also to Tannit/Astarte, another syncretism which embraces all three Canaanite goddesses. In *Phoenician History*, written by Philo of Biblos, all three goddesses (ie, Astarte, Rhea (Asherah), and Dione ('Anat?)) appear as wives-sisters of Kronos (El; Oden 1976:34; Dever 1984:29). Presumably, they 'could be worshipped separately or together' (Oden 1976:34). Even the Hebrew Bible, at times, tends to use the plural (ie, the 'Asherim/Asheroth;' see Jdg 3:7; cf also Jdg 2:13 ('the Ba'als and the Ashtaroth,' ie, Ba'al and Astarte, also in the plural)). It is also worth noting that Asherah and Astarte are often interchanged (Jdg 3:7 (Asheroth) and 2:13 (Ashtaroth)). In the Keret Epic from Ugarit, parallel mention is made of 'Asherah of Tyre' and 'Elat the goddess of Sidon; 1 Kings (11:5,33) and 2 Kings (23:13), on the other hand, refer to 'Ashtoreth (Astarte), the goddess of the Sidonians,' while the Septuagint confuses 'Asherim' and 'Ashtoreth/Ashtaroth' (Jdg 3:7; 2 Chr 24:18; Dever 1984:29).

*3.3.6.2 Canaanite religion in the Common Era*

Oden (1976:33-34) has concluded that Canaanite religion and, in particular, the cult of Asherah, persisted well into the Common Era. The description in *The Syrian Goddess*, a work attributed to the 2nd century CE author Lucian, of the cult of the north Syrian city of Hierapolis (*Mabbug*, in Syriac; situated northeast of Aleppo), has many similarities to those of the Canaanites more than 1500 years earlier. In his view, the account is 'trustworthy,' since 'at every place where it can be checked, the information ... proves to be accurate' (1976:33). While he concedes that there are differences when compared to the religion of the Ugaritic texts, 'it is the similarities between these religions, and not their differences, which are most impressive' (1976:36).

The place of honour in the religion described in *The Syrian Goddess*, is taken by a female deity, who Lucian calls Hera and who appears with her consort Zeus (Ba'al/Hadad) on a Roman coin (from the reign of Alexander Severus) from Hierapolis. She is depicted seated on a lion-throne bearing the Asherah/Tannit sign. Her native name is *'Atar'ata*, which became Atargatis in Greek - a name which is known from epigraphic evidence from Delos, Hatra, Nabatea, and elsewhere, as well as from other visitors to the site (Oden 1976:33-34).

The name *'Atar'ata*, according to Oden (1976:34), 'combines the names certainly of 'Ashtart (Aramaic *'tr*) and 'Anat (Aramaic *'t*), and perhaps also of Asherah (Aramaic *'tr*).' Her multiple origin is also noted by Lucian who points out her many attributes, that is, those of Athena, Aphrodite, Selene, Rhea, Artemis, Nemesis, and the Fates. Like Asherah in the Ugaritic texts, Atargartis is a mother goddess and she bears the same symbol, that of a spindle. Her sign is a representation of a sacred fish (cf 'the Lady who traverses the Sea' (*rabbatu 'athiratu yammi*); and the marine life which accompanies the sign of Punic Tannit). She (cf Canaanite Astarte) is also a goddess of sexual love, who is associated with sacred prostitutes and doves. However, her association with lions and her more certain position as Ba'al/Hadad's consort, in addition to the second half of her name, link her strongly to 'Anat (Oden 1976:34). As Oden (1976:36) has observed, 'At Ugarit, as in the Hellenistic world and beyond, each goddess retained her distinct identity, yet could be worshipped with her sisters as one.'

A similar conclusion may be drawn from other aspects of the religion described by Lucian. The male deity (a god of war, who is depicted sitting on a pair of bulls) was called Zeus by the inhabitants of Hierapolis, but was also called by another name - one which is known from other testimony to be Hadad (Ba'al) - and, just as El was the leader of the pantheon (although not its most active member) at Ugarit, at Hierapolis *Thesphata* (who has the same iconography as that of Canaanite El) was the god who issued 'divine decrees' and who had to be consulted by the gods prior to any significant action (Oden 1976:36).

The cult of Tannit in Palestine appears to have continued, at least, until the 2nd century CE; a coin from that period, which was found at Ashkelon, mentions a temple of the goddess Paneablos (ie, Panei Ba'al; Stern 2006:179), while a square lead weight (5 x 5 cm; dated to 'Year 12 of the era of Tyre', ie, 115 BCE) was discovered in a large public building in Area D1, during the final season of the excavations at Tel Dor (1980-2000; Stern 2006:177). The face shows a schematic representation of Tannit (with a circular head, triangular body and outstretched arms) and the reverse, a heavy club, one of the signs of Heracles who, during this period, was identified with the principal god of Tyre, Ba'al-Melqart ('King of the City') and was her consort.

### 3.3.7 Death and the afterlife in Canaanite thought

Although written documents do exist containing many scattered, disorganised and casual allusions to the themes of death and the afterlife in Canaan, no text even vaguely comparable to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* has yet been discovered; neither are there any showing 'a direct and theoretical interest in the phenomenon of death and its biological and cultural consequences' (Xella 1995:2059). In addition to these allusions, however, archaeological evidence (burial places, the treatment of bodies, funereal offerings, etc) is able to shed light on some of the external aspects of death and its accompanying rituals. Examination of tombs in Syro-Palestine, from the Neolithic period onwards, confirms that the people of Canaan believed that life continued in some manner in the hereafter, as alluded to in the textual evidence. Our knowledge of Canaanite beliefs regarding death and the afterlife, however, remains far from complete (Xella 1995:2059-2060).

*3.3.7.1 Textual evidence*

Although the ancient kingdom of Ugarit was relatively small and unimportant politically, Xella (1995:2061) is of the opinion that its beliefs, myths and rites can 'be considered representative of the religious situation of the whole geographical area.' The texts from Ras Shamra, make it clear that Ugaritic society was deeply interested in the phenomenon of death and its connection with the afterlife (Xella 1995:2061). In the Ugaritic myths, (eg, that of Ba'al and Mot), the central theme in the narrative is death. The 'Aqhat and Keret epics deal with the more human aspects of the crises caused by death, specifically those of a king, who has no descendants (eg, that of Danil's young son, 'Aqhat, who is killed in the prime of his youth and in which his journey to the afterlife to meet his ancestors is described in some detail). Although no explicit descriptions of funeral rites are given, there are frequent allusions to those conducted under the auspices of the king. Oracular texts deal with the afterlife and its inhabitants, while others involving a dead king describe a ritual banquet for the dead (cf the *kispu*, the family banquet held to honour the spirits of the ancestors described in the Mari texts; Xella 1995:2060,2062).

Death for a human was inevitable - only the gods were exempted from this fate - with no rewards for the righteous, nor punishments for the wicked. Mot was sure to be encountered, sooner or later, and followed to the hereafter (Xella 1995:2062-2063). The loss of the ethereal and vital element of life (*npsh*) occurred, according to the description of the death of Danil's son (carried out by the assassin Yatpan on the instructions of 'Anat), when the wind (*rh*) separated from the body through blood letting, spittle and as smoke from the nose. Although little remained of 'Aqhat after vultures had devoured him, his father ensured that his remains were properly buried in the family vault, ensuring 'a point of reference for the cultic contacts between the deceased and survivors' (Xella 1995:2063). After death, however, life continued in the kingdom of the 'divine' Mot, a putrid, dusty, subterranean 'abode of confinement,' 'well' or 'ruins.' In the account of the struggle between Mot and Ba'al, a detailed itinerary is given of the journey of Ba'al's messengers who, although not dead, are bearers of tidings for Mot. If they get too close to Mot, they would be swallowed by him, his mouth being the access to the afterlife and his abdomen the subterranean abode of the dead (cf Nm 16:32-33; 'and the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up ... so they ... went down alive into

Sheol; and the earth closed over them;' see also Pr 1:12 and Is 5:14). Crucial to this journey, were the actions of the living: an appropriate burial, mourning rites, and funereal offerings (eg, food and drink) placed in close proximity to the tomb, to prevent a hazardous return to the realms of the living. These actions were primarily the tasks of the children of the deceased, which explains the importance of leaving descendants. In the ancient world, it was generally accepted that the care of parents, both in life and death, was the duty of the children (Xella 1995:2064).

The mourning rites displayed by the gods were, presumably, emulated by the ordinary people. Both El and 'Anat, on hearing of Ba'al's death, are said to have covered their heads with ashes or dust, fallen to the ground and rolled in the dirt and worn special garments; self mutilation (lacerating the flesh) is also said to have been involved (Xella 1995:2065). Keret's children are described as wailing for him, while 'Aqhat's father tore his clothes, hurled oaths and then participated in a ritual lament performed by professional mourners. The representation on the lid of the sarcophagus (ca 12$^{th}$ or 11$^{th}$ century BCE) of Ahirom/Ahiram, the king of Byblos (modern Jubayl), depicts the king's funeral ceremony being held under the auspices of his son. Offerings are being made to the dead king, who is seated on a throne, in the presence of mourners (Xella 1995:2065). After 'Anat and the sun-goddess, Shapash, had discovered Ba'al's body and before 'Anat took his remains to his sacred mountain, Mount Saphon, 'Anat is said to have slaughtered various animals for the nourishment of the now dead Ba'al.

Mot, although death personified, is not only 'divine,' but is also referred to as 'El's beloved' and is described as being indispensable to the cosmic order created by El, the father of the gods. He is neither cruel nor does he obtain satisfaction from his actions (Xella:1995:2065). Death was not a tragedy; it was inevitable. The Raipiuma (the term used to indicate the dead, from a root that etymologically means 'to heal' (*rp'*); Xella 1995:2066) were capable of intervening on behalf of the living: healing and protecting them, fostering their fertility and providing them with oracular responses. Although not equally powerful - the ancestors included the mythological deceased and historical rulers, as well as ordinary people, gathered into a mythological community under the leadership of Ba'al - all the ancestors were venerated and endowed with important roles in the survival of the human society and this included the nuclear family (Xella 1995:2065-2066).

*3.3.7.2 Archaeological evidence*

The funereal architecture at Ras Shamra reveals that it was customary to live alongside the tombs of one's ancestors (Xella 1995:2061). Each house was planned to accommodate not only the living, but also the dead. The tombs of the kings, for example, were found below the royal palace. The family tomb (its size and furnishings depended on the economic situation of the family) was designed to hold a number of generations and it was generally built at the time the house itself was constructed. It was usually placed under the floor in a burial chamber which was accessed from inside the house by means of underground shafts and corridors. Schaeffer (cited by Lewis 1986:161-162) has pointed out that a number of devices were used to bring libations down to the deceased. Some tombs were equipped with pipes which led from ground level down into the tomb; Tomb L, on the other hand, had a hole at the top, covered with a capstone, through which libations would have been offered to the deceased.

It is apparent that the living desired to stay connected to, and in constant communication with, the dead. The latter were remembered and cared for by means of prayers, memorials, as well as food and drink offerings (ie, the necessities unavailable in the afterlife); in return and, as confirmed in the Ugaritic texts, the living would be granted health, fertility and insights into the future through divination (Xella 1995:2061).

The funeral beliefs and rites of Late Bronze Ugarit persisted amongst the later Phoenicians, who employed the word Rephaim (as does the Hebrew Bible (Hebrew: *rephaim*); cf Rapiuma at Ugarit) to indicate the dead, although according to Xella (1995:2066), the term was used 'in a more general sense.' A series of Phoenician royal inscriptions (1st millennium BCE) reveal that a corpse required special treatment and an appropriate burial or cremation, with adequate funereal offerings. Those who disturbed the dead were condemned to a life without descendants and would, therefore, be forgotten by all after death. The divine personification of death was called Muth by Philo of Byblos and was considered by him to be the equivalent of Thanatos and Pluto. Several Phoenician deities (eg, Eshmun and Melqart) are said to have returned from hell (cf Ba'al) and served as mediators between the worlds of the living and the dead (Xella 1995:2067).

## 3.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR RELIGION AND CULT IN SYRIA-PALESTINE DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE (ca 1500-1200 BCE)

Should the majority of the central hill country settlers have originated from the lowlands of Palestine, one would expect that their religious practices would show continuity with, and be practically indistinguishable from, those of the Late Bronze Canaanite cult. Thus, a brief summary of the physical remains as revealed by archaeology will follow.

### 3.4.1 'High places'

#### *3.4.1.1 General remarks*

Although the gods were credited with the ability to manifest themselves wherever they wished to be, some sites were deemed to be particularly suitable for their presence and were hedged off from the surrounding world. At first, 'high places' were apparently open-air shrines on hill tops. In towns, a mound of earth or stones represented the hilltop (Millard 1973:44). At Gezer, the 'high place' was a raised platform of squared stones on which stood eight (possibly eleven) limestone monoliths, aligned for some 28m roughly north-south. One of these stones was set in a stone socket and two others faced a large limestone block, thought to have once supported an *'asherah* (Gray 1964:66; see below). That the area was sacred, is indicated by the burials in the subsoil of young infants - no more than a few days old - in jars (dated to the middle of the second millennium BCE). Gray (1964:67-68) has suggested that these burials may have been offerings of the first-born (cf the dedication of the first-born males of man and beast to God (Ex 13:1-2; 22:29-30)) or, perhaps, the infants were simply buried in the fulfilment of a vow. He has also suggested that the monoliths are either 'memorials of theophanies' (cf the pillar erected and anointed by Jacob at Bethel; Gn 35:14-15); or possibly 'memorials of great ones among the ancestors of the community who had manifestly possessed the divine favour (*beraka*) and who, as in primitive Arab society, are the patron saints (*welis*) of the people' (Gray 1964:67). Two caves - originally used as dwellings in the Chalcolithic period, but later joined by a crooked tunnel - which are associated with the

complex, may have been used for oracles.

The slightly oval, dry-stone mound (which still stands about 1.8m high and is 7.5 to 9m across), with a flight of seven steps and enclosed by a wall, adjoining the three Middle Bronze Age temples (ca 1900 BCE) at Megiddo, is another example of a 'high-place' in a town (Gray 1964:68), while in Nahariyah, a similar feature has been discovered (Dothan 1956:14-25).

'High places' (*bamot*) feature prominently in the Hebrew Bible; it is thus worth examining at least one Canaanite 'high place' in some detail.

*3.4.1.2 Nahariyah*

During the 1954/55 excavations of a *teminos* (sacred area) near the beach at Nahariyah (ca 25km north of Haifa), three major building phases (A, B and C, with five distinct levels; presumably Hyksos), were uncovered. The site was abandoned, at the earliest, about the middle of the 16$^{th}$ century BCE and the period of its greatest prosperity was during the 17$^{th}$ century, that is, when the Hyksos civilization was flourishing in Canaan (Dothan 1956:15,24). Phase A, the earliest settlement (ie, layer V), was erected on virgin soil and consisted of a building (ca 6 x 6m), with a small, roughly circular, *bamah* (ca 6m in diameter) against its southern wall, comprised of stones (rubble and pebbles; Dothan, 1956:15-17). A smaller structure was added to the north wall of the building, later during Phase A. A number of objects were found on the stones of the *bamah* and its immediate vicinity, confirming its function as a 'high place.' The cult site was extended considerably in Phase B (levels IV - III); a new larger temple (level IV) was built to the north and the *bamah* was extended to include the original temple. Two steps made of large flat stones led up to what previously had been the temple and now formed the centre of the *bamah* (ca 14m in diameter). At its southwestern end a solid stone pillar (preserved up to a height of 90cm) had been erected. Between the closely packed large and small stones comprising the *bamah*, a dark oily substance which had hardened over the years was discovered. This oily substance had probably been part of the offerings made by the worshippers who had ascended the *bamah*. Between the new temple and the *bamah* were remnants of a courtyard and 4 metres to the west of the *bamah* was another flat area paved with pebbles, enclosed with upright flat stones; the south corner of this

area featured a small receptacle (60 x 50cm) built of flat stone slabs sunk into the pavement (Dothan 1956:17-18, 23).

The *bamah* became smaller in Phase C (levels II - I). By level II most of it had apparently already been covered by later floor levels. In order to emphasise its centre, a rectangular structure was erected there (the two parallel surviving walls are 4m in length and 70-80cm wide). Extensive changes to the temple were made at the beginning of level I, when it was reconstructed on wider foundations and lateral rooms were added to the central hall (Dothan 1956:18).

The objects found leave one in no doubt about the area having been a place of worship and parallels for many of these finds are known from Palestine and elsewhere (eg, Byblos, Megiddo, Tell el-'Ajjul and Ugarit; Dothan 1956:19-20, 23-24). Accompanying the oily substance and between the stones of the small *bamah*, as well as on the floors of the courtyard, were dozens of intact small pottery bowls, each with seven small cups. These probably had served as offering vessels and not as lamps, as witnessed by the lack of soot. Other finds from the sacred area include seven-wick saucer lamps, tiny pottery vessels (bowls, jugs, jars, etc), numerous animal bones mixed with ash, fragments of incense stands, hundreds of beads made of semiprecious stones (agate, carnelian, amethyst, rock crystal, etc), bronze, silver and gold jewellery (either from the floors of the early temple or the *bamah* or in jars; eg, bronze and silver toggle pins, earrings, pendants and Hyksos scarabs), a bronze spearhead and part of a mould for casting weapons. In addition, there were zoomorphic figurines (eg, sheep, bulls, doves and a squatting monkey) and beads (eg, a bird and a lion). Thousands of cooking pot rims were recovered from the courtyard. The most significant objects, according to Dothan (1956:20-21), are the figurines, mainly of female deities. These take the form of either flat, thin silver plaques or silver and bronze figurines cast in a mould. Most of the former are shown wearing crowns or tiaras, all have their legs joined together, while some show their arms joined to the sides of the body or extended forward; one is shown supporting her breasts with her hands. Some of the figurines cast in a mould have long hair and wear crowns or tiaras, while two show a figure wearing a crown with her arms crossed on her chest; there is also one moulded male figurine.

The floor of the *bamah* in level IV (Dothan 1956:21) yielded a stone mould (22cm long x 7cm wide) used to cast figurines of a slender naked woman with small breasts, a protruding

navel and with her hands extended along her thighs. She has long hair, strings of beads on her forehead and neck and she wears a tall conical hat, with two long pointed horns projecting from it. A small offering vessel yielded fragments of silver horns which matched the grooves of the mould representing the horns (traces of metal were found on the mould). Dothan (1956:22) suspects that the figurines were cast and sold on site to the worshippers. In order to strengthen the cast, a metal connection would have been inserted between the arms and chest and two metal pins were inserted in tiny holes in the stone mould to connect the two parts of the mould.

The chief deity was identified by Ben-Dor, during the 1947 excavations, as Ashrath-Yam, a sea goddess connected with fishing, who may be identified with Asherah. Asherah was the chief goddess of both Tyre and Sidon, which are in close proximity to Nahariyah (Dothan 1956:23-24).

### 3.4.2 Temples

The temple is specifically associated with sedentary life. As houses of the gods they consisted of little more than a room for the god, containing a statue or some other sacred symbol to represent his/her presence, as well as compartments for priests and worshippers (Gray 1964:69).

Nearly thirty Late Bronze I-II temples from Syria-Palestine have been discovered (Dever 1987:222-223). Syrian temples include those of ‘Ba‘al’ and ‘Dagan’ at Ugarit, as well as those of Carchemish, Ebenda II-I, Kamid el-Loz, Mumbaqat, and Meskene. Most of these temples are of the *Langbau* type, which is apparently a local Canaanite temple form which first appeared in Syria-Palestine around the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age and which continued well into the Iron II period. At least twenty Late Bronze I-II temples have been published in some detail. To those published mainly in the 1940s and 50s (the Stratum VIIA Temple 2048 at Megiddo; the Strata IX (‘Mekal’), VIII, and VII temples at Beth-shan; Fosse Temples I-III at Lachish; and the Area C Stele, Area H Orthostat, Area A Longroom, and Area F Square temples at Hazor) may be added those published more recently: the Field V Migdal Temple 2 at Shechem; the ‘Airport Temple’ at Amman; the Mt. Gerizim/Tananir

Temple; the Deir ‘Alla Sanctuary; the Timnah Temple; the Jaffa ‘Lion Temple;’ the temples at Shiqmonah, at Tel Kittan III, and at Tel Mevorakh XI-IX; and the Level VII ‘Summit Temple’ at Lachish (Dever 1987:222-223).

The plans of these temples varied from locality to locality. Both Mazar and Stern (in Dever 1987:223) have attempted a typological classification of the Late Bronze temples. Mazar sees Palestinian Late Bronze I-II temples as either ‘symmetric’ or ‘irregular.’ The ‘symmetric’ temples are mostly of the bipartite longroom type, with direct access, and are part of the local Canaanite traditions going back to the Middle and, perhaps, even the Early Bronze Age in Palestine. He considers the ‘irregular’ temples (eg, the Lachish Fosse Temples) to be more ‘foreign,’ perhaps of Cypro-Aegean derivation. Stern has suggested several rather general categories, the most common one being the ‘bench temple,’ with subtypes being distinguished on the basis of whether or not the cella is raised. The ‘bench temple’ is the predominant local Palestinian type with a history that stretches back as far as the Chalcolithic period (Dever 1987:223).

### 3.4.3 Temple paraphernalia

Nearly all of the known temples have central platforms or arches, and those of Palestine, in particular, have low front and side benches. The presence of benches, in addition to altars, would seem to indicate that a central activity of the cult involved the presentation of votive and sacrificial offerings. With respect to movable objects, although Syrian excavations have, until recently been less than thorough, the ‘Ba‘al’ and ‘Dagan’ temples at Ugarit, for example, have yielded an abundance of material. The Alalakh temples (Levels IV and I) have produced bronze weapons, beads, bullae, scarabs, basalt altars, terra-cotta stands, and statuettes of King Idri-mi, as well as of a goddess (Dever 1987:225).

Palestinian temples have also yielded many cult objects. The rich hoard from the Late Bronze sanctuary at Tel Mevorakh (14$^{th}$ century onwards) includes a large assemblage of pottery and ceramic votive vessels, stone vessels, bronze objects (daggers, a knife, arrowheads, jewellery, cymbals, and a serpent), glass pendants, cylinder seals and beads (Stern 2000:47-48). Amongst the more interesting items from the Stratum VII temple (‘the Temple of Amenophis

III;' 14th century) at Beth-shan are figurines portraying a goddess (some with two horns and others with 'Hathor headdresses' (a sun-disc between cow-horns)), an ivory castanet bearing the head of a goddess, a bronze dagger, an axe head, small pottery serpents, incense stands, pottery animals' heads and a small clay model of a serpent on a plaque (Rowe 1940:6-12). Other sites have produced terra-cotta stands and temple/house models and ceramic votive vessels of several types.

Temple paraphernalia also included sacred stones (*massebot*), *'asherim* (possibly tree trunks or sacred wooden pillars) and incense altars. The sacred stones may have originally served as memorials (cf the Temple of Obelisks at Byblos), but probably came to embody the spirits of the gods or people connected with them. Some bear inscriptions naming the persons being commemorated; others may have been plastered and then inscribed with substances such as paint or ink (cf Dt 27:2-8), which would have faded with time (Millard 1973:46).

Unsurprisingly, being wooden (ie, perishable) and often erected at open-air cult sites, no *'asherah* has survived (Day 1986:404). However, the socket in a stone base discovered in the first Canaanite temple excavated by Rowe at Beth-shan, as well as those from the earlier 'high place' at Gezer and a contemporary temple at Byblos (18th century) may have been used to hold *'asherim*. The square-cut depression (0.86 x 0.58m and 0.40m deep) in a large limestone block (1.85 x 1.52 x 0.76m) at Gezer had no sign of a plaster-lining and so was presumably not used as a container for liquid, although it could have been used for short periods for a thicker fluid such as blood from sacrifices (Gray 1964:66).

### 3.4.4 Other cultic objects

Figurines, most of which represent various deities (both male and female; the majority average 15cm in height), are commonly found in Canaanite towns, outside of temple precincts (Millard 1973:46; Dever 1987:226). Bronze figurines are usually male and often depict Ba'al with a bundle of thunderbolts in his upraised arm (cf his storm-god imagery ('Cloud Rider') at Ugarit). Seated statuettes probably represent El on his throne. Although a few bronze or gold plaques or pendants (in the MB II style) portray female deities, these are usually depicted as mould-made terra-cotta figurines. These 'Mother Goddess' figurines probably portray

Elat/Asherah or 'Anat - nude and *en face*. They appear either as standing goddesses (often wearing 'Hathor headdresses' and clutching serpents or lotus/lily blossoms in their outstretched hands; sometimes they are depicted with exaggerated pubic triangles) or as reclining 'couch' figurines, with their arms extended at their sides. It has been suggested that the latter are possibly not deities, but are 'mourning figures' connected with funeral rites (Dever 1987:226). Since most of these figurines were not found *in situ*, it is open to speculation whether they were votives for temples or for household shrines. Gray (1964:230) has suggested that the moulded clay plaque figurines of fertility goddesses, which are common to Bronze Age strata sites in both Syria and Palestine, were possibly for personal use to promote childbirth and were acquired after making a vow at a shrine (cf 1 Sm 1:10ff).

### 3.4.5 Tombs, mortuary installations, and burial deposits

Burial customs should be able to shed some light on religious beliefs and practices. To date, the numerous Late Bronze Syria-Palestine tombs and their contents as a resource for insight into cult practices, have largely been ignored (Dever 1987:228). The Late Bronze I period has yielded very little useful information thus far regarding the funerary cult, or cults, mainly because many of the tombs were partially cleared and reused during later periods (Leonard 1989:12,16), while the impressive funerary assemblages which can be assigned either wholly or partially to the Late Bronze IIA period have been used to illustrate the era as being wealthy and cosmopolitan. A good example of the typical large tombs, often accommodating multiple burials and well-stocked with expensive material goods that were used during this period, is Cave 10A at Gezer (Leonard 1989:22). Although it was probably originally dug as a cistern, it was used throughout most of the 15$^{th}$ and part of the 14$^{th}$ centuries BCE for burial purposes. This tomb contained more than a hundred complete vessels, both local and Cypriot, as well as many other expensive grave goods and yielded a sarcophagus, dating to Late Bronze IIA or slightly earlier, containing a single adult and twelve young children. Evidently, it was originally meant for the interment of an adult and a child, but was later used as a repository for the remains of the other children in subsequent burials in the tomb. This unique, full-length sarcophagus is decorated with rows of handles along the lid and down the sides and

resembles the *larnax*-burials known from Crete, dating to the Middle to Late Minoan period. The entrance passage of Cave 10A contained a tall female of around 34 years of age and, in the area close to one of her hands, lay one of the finest and earliest Egyptian glass vessels found in Palestine thus far (Leonard 1989:23).

Very little Late Bronze material has come to light at Tel Dan; the Late Bronze city is thought to be located on the western part of the mound where excavations are difficult, due to the abundant water and thick vegetation. The existence of the Late Bronze Tomb 387 (the 'Mycenaean' Tomb; LBA II; Str VII in Area B), however, suggests that a large and wealthy community existed in the 14$^{th}$ - 13$^{th}$ centuries BCE (cf Jdg 18:7, where the people of Laish (the name means 'Lion') are described as 'lacking nothing that is in the earth, and possessing wealth;' Biran 1980:172-173). It contained a relatively large number of Mycenaean imports, as well as local ware and two Cypriot vessels, in addition to the approximately 40 interments of men, women and children, ranging in age from 5 to about 60 years (average age 25-30 years), 25 of which could be identified as males and 9 as females (Biran 1994:111-116; Leonard 1989:23). Anthropological examination has revealed that some of those who were buried in Tomb 387 were not part of the local Canaanite population (Biran 1994:114). The origin of this foreign element, however, remains a mystery.

Many sites have demonstrated that a number of different and unusual burial customs were practised during Late Bronze IIB. Two tombs (102 and 117) from the cemetery at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh contained the deceased wrapped in cloth and subsequently coated in bitumen - a practice which may have been 'in imitation of, or as a substitute for, more standard Egyptian rites of mummification' (Leonard 1989:32-33). A third tomb, which was lined with mud-brick and contained a more conventional type of interment, yielded a wide variety of expensive grave offerings including a wine set (laver, bowl, strainer, and juglet), all lying close at hand, presumably for use in the afterlife. Grave 45 appears to have been a variant of the 'double *pithos*' burial, where the deceased was interred inside two large storage jars broken and joined at the shoulders to create a kind of coffin. This type of burial is typically Hittite and many examples have been found in Anatolia dating to the period of the Hittite empire (Kempinski 1979:41). In this case, however, the neck of the jar had been broken off in order to accommodate the head and upper torso of the deceased, while the lower torso was covered with large flat sherds from similar *pithoi* (Leonard 1989:32,34).

Locally made anthropoid sarcophagi, such as those from Deir el-Balah, Beth-shan and Tell el-Far'ah (S), seem to further demonstrate Egyptian influence on the burial practices of, at least, part of Canaanite society. This type of coffin was used in middle-class burials in the Egyptian delta during the New Kingdom. Many of these large clay sarcophagi from Palestine have the image of the face and/or upper torso of the deceased modelled on the lid. The accompanying funerary offerings, both in Egypt and Canaan, include pottery and a variety of artifacts from as far away as Cyprus and the Aegean world (Leonard 1989:33)

A reinterpretation of the tomb deposits as symbolic votives to the gods, or as food offerings for the dead may be a fruitful avenue for future research; in addition, the actual style of tomb architecture may suggest conceptions of life after death (Dever 1987:228).

### 3.4.6 Interpreting the finds

The temple *favissae* and the prominence of the altar and/or low benches in the otherwise relatively small and uncluttered Late Bronze temples, with their simple bipartite/tripartite or 'irregular' floor plans, would seem to suggest that the main aspects of Canaanite temple worship involved votive offerings of food and drink, as well as animal sacrifices (Dever 1987:228-31).

#### *3.4.6.1 Food and drink offerings*

Food and drink offerings, animal sacrifices, various libations, and possibly incense offerings, are also indicated by the abundance of ceramic vessels, cult stands and small altars. However, the nature of the foodstuffs and animals used, as well as how they were presented (whole, burnt, consumed on the premises, etc) remains unclear since, in most cases according to Dever (1987:229), few careful palaeo-botanical/zoological studies have been done. Certain archaeological remains, nevertheless, are able to contribute to the knowledge of cult practice. The large rectangular stone altar and semicircular sacrificial basin, with a drain channel constructed from discarded cult stands leading away from the area, in the forecourt of the Late Bronze I Area H Orthostat temple at Hazor (Yadin 1975:114), is an indication of blood

sacrifice. Votives were made and probably offered for sale in the *temenos* area, since the forecourt is equipped with a potter's workshop (Yadin 1975:115). The latter contained a kiln and a number of stacks of miniature, standardised bowls. Small stelae have been found *in situ* at a number of sites (eg, the stele of 'Mekal' (El/Ba'al)[19]) from the Stratum IX 'Thutmosis III' temple at Beth-shan; the Tannit stele from the Area C stele-temple at Hazor; the gold relief representation of Qudshu-Asherah-'Anat from the 'Summit Temple' at Lachish). These stelae indicate that representations of the gods could be erected by temple officials, or perhaps offered as votives by the worshippers themselves (Dever 1987:229).

*3.4.6.2 Cult/temple rituals*

The Ugaritic texts suggest that public celebrations, banquets, 'cult drama' recitations (possibly by antiphonal choirs), sacred prostitution, and the like were part of cult observance. Bronze finger cymbals (14th century BCE; 10cm in diameter), with a tiny wire used to slip over the musician's finger affixed to the centre, were discovered in a Canaanite shrine in the lower city of Hazor (King & Stager 2001:297). Bronze cymbals were also recovered from the *migdal* temple (2048) in Late Bronze Megiddo, as well as Tel Mevorakh (Stern 2000:47). These cymbals, the administrative texts which mention singers and 'the regular rhythm of the mythological texts and their association with the cult' (Gray 1964:182) suggest that music was part of temple service. The clay mask from Area C at Hazor may indicate cult drama (at 14cm high, however, it is too small to put on the face of an adult; Yadin 1975:49,51-52). There is, however, no other archaeological evidence for any of these temple practices. Large-scale public rituals would have been impossible in the small, simply designed temples; other than a small open forecourt, these temples generally lack any associated structures. Temple worship

19 Gray (1964:74,123) believes that the god 'Mekal' ('Annihilator;' Hebrew: *mekalleh*) of Beth-shan should be identified as Resheph since he is wearing gazelle horns on the front of his helmet. Resheph's cult is known to have penetrated into Lower Egypt during the 18th and 19th Dynasties, where he is depicted in Egyptian sculpture as an active Ba'al-like warrior god with gazelle horns on his helmet. In addition, the place-name Arsuf (Rashpunna in Assyrian annals of the 8th century BCE), on the coast just north of Jaffa, would appear to confirm the existence of his cult in Palestine. Reseph, the sender of pestilence, would have been particularly 'virulent in the malarial region of Beth-shan' (Gray 1964:123).

thus appears to have been individual, simple and private, involving little ritual other than the presentation of individual gifts. If large public functions were indeed part of cult observance, they presumably took place elsewhere (eg, in the open, in the palaces, or in large public buildings). Fertility rituals were, no doubt, practised to appease the gods and to ensure both the fertility of the land and the continuance of the family line. A tradition of individual worship may account for the ubiquity of Late Bronze figurines, which were perhaps worshipped in unrecognised domestic shrines (Dever 1987:229-230). The extent of participation by the ordinary people in temple worship, however, and their religious beliefs remain open to speculation and may have included the existence of sacred wells and springs (Millard 1973:47).

One of the means of divination in the Near East was through observation of the entrails of sacrificial animals. The excavator of the *maison du pretre* (priest's house) at Ugarit (Courtois in *Ugaritica VI*; cited by Leonard (1989:16)) found evidence for divination through the inspection of animal livers (hepatoscopy). Clay models of livers have been found in Palestine (eg, the small clay model of a cow's liver with cuneiform inscriptions of omens - presumably used to instruct aspiring diviners - found in a *favissa* in the southern part of the Statum 2 temple court in Area H of Hazor's Lower City; 15$^{th}$ century BCE; Yadin 1975:114).

*3.4.6.3 Deities worshipped*

The temples were not necessarily devoted exclusively to one god. Each of the three temples, in close proximity to the *bamah* at Megiddo, contained a single dais (pedestal) and was presumably dedicated to only one god, while the small Late Bronze shrine in the Hyksos fosse outside the Lachish city wall contained a long dais with three projections, apparently altars, indicating that a triad was worshipped there (possibly, El, Asherah and Ba'al) and, at the earliest sanctuary at Beth-shan (late 15$^{th}$ and early 14$^{th}$ centuries), the male god 'Mekal,' as well as a female deity were worshipped (Gray 1964:70-71).

The identification of the individual deities worshipped is anything but clear and is partly

circumstantial. The assignment of the temples at Ugarit as being those of 'Ba'al' and 'Dagan'[20] lacks any archaeological foundation. It is possible to recognise 'Mekal' at Beth-shan, Tannit (Asherah) at Hazor and Qudshu-Asherah-'Anat at Lachish, and an ewer from Fosse Temple III at Lachish mentions 'a gift, a lamb for my lady Elat' (Asherah). One of Asherah's principal epithets in Late Bronze - Iron I (confirmed by recent archaeological and textual data) was 'the Lion Lady.' A well-preserved lioness skull was found on the altar of the 'Lion Temple' at Jaffa (LB - Iron I). The 'snake-goddess' (probably Asherah-'Anat, who is often depicted holding snakes) may have been worshipped at Megiddo, Gezer, Hazor, Tel Mevorakh, and Timnah, since bronze snakes have been found in sacred contexts at these sites. Temple and domestic contexts have yielded several bronze figurines of, in all likelihood, El and Ba'al (Dever 1987:230-231).

In contrast to the cult at Ugarit, where 'Anat is more prominent than Astarte, their relative positions appear to be reversed in Palestine (Gray 1965:176). While there are no clear traces of a cult of 'Anat in Palestine (apart from the place-names and in the proper name Shamgar Ben-Anath in the Hebrew Bible (see 3.3.2.2), as well as the el-Khadr arrowheads (see 3.3.6.1)), she is not totally unknown (cf the basalt panel from the 'Northern Temple of Ramesses III' at Beth-shan with the dedication of a certain Egyptian Hesi-Nekht (or perhaps 'The singer (?), Nekht') to 'Antit ('Anat), Queen of Heaven and Mistress of the Gods;' Rowe 1940:33-34). The name, Astarte, occurs more frequently (eg, it appears in Egyptian hieroglyphics on a seal from Bethel (ca 1300 BCE; Gray 1964:124).

In the Egyptian Execration Texts, the name Horon (as Horon-abu) appears thrice (Gray 1965:179); Dagan, however, is not named in the theophoric names in those relating to Palestine, but does appear in the name Dagan-takala - a name which is associated with Southern Palestine - in the Amarna texts (Gray 1965:178).

20 The find of stelae devoted to Dagan, in close proximity to the 'Dagan' temple, for example, earned it its name; a 'house of Dagan,' however, is not mentioned in the Ugaritic texts (Pardee 2002:228).

## 3.5 CONCLUSION

The Late Bronze temples and their contents reflect a direct continuity with the earlier Canaanite Middle Bronze Age culture of Syria-Palestine and the impressive funerary assemblages with their array of imported luxury goods, as well as the diverse burial types, would appear to confirm that Late Bronze Canaanite society was both wealthy and cosmopolitan. That a multiplicity of deities was worshipped by the Canaanites is supported by the known temples at individual sites: they are both numerous and varied in type. Hazor and Lachish, for example, have no less that four contemporary Late Bronze temples (Dever 1987:231). It is unclear whether different deities had different temples or whether all could be worshipped at the same temple. Perhaps, which deity was being worshipped reflected the worshipper's personal choice? That few images of the gods have survived - and some of those which have, appear to have been deliberately broken (eg, the figure of the male deity from the Late Bronze Area C temple at Hazor; Yadin 1975:43-44) is unsurprising considering Canaan's history (eg, the repeated rebellions involving Syria, the Assyrian punitive raids, and the periodic reformations in Israel and Judah; Gray 1964:73). The Ugaritic texts point to a vibrant cult of the dead at Ugarit. This is confirmed by the existence of funeral vaults under many of the Late Bronze houses at Ras Shamra, equipped with apertures/pipes leading from ground level down into the tomb, enabling libations to be made.

Archaeological evidence points to the predominance of a 'fertility cult' and the 'Mother Goddess' fertility figurines underscore the reproduction theme. Although the religion of the Canaanites has been castigated by many as being 'amoral,' in my opinion its main feature, that is, the fertility-cult, is perfectly understandable. It should also be pointed out that the sexual depravity, which some have claimed to be characteristic of the Canaanite fertility cult, has left no trace in any of the Ugaritic texts dealing with the everyday contacts between Ugaritians and their deities (Pardee 2002:234). What could be more appropriate to the heirs of generations of subsistence farmers than a religion primarily concerned with 'man's efforts to enlist Providence in supplying his primary need, his daily food and the propagation of his kind' (Gray 1964:138)? That cult and ritual were intrinsically related to nature is unsurprising for a marginal-zone society, with an agricultural-based economy; the votives were the propitiatory offerings, while the food offerings and animal sacrifices are symbolic

representations of agriculture and pastoralism, the main elements of the Canaanite Late Bronze Age economy. These conclusions are in general agreement with what is known from the Ugaritic texts concerning both the Canaanite pantheon and the nature of religion in Late Bronze Age Syria-Palestine. Unfortunately, our knowledge of Canaanite culture is little more than 'a few spotlighted areas on an otherwise dark stage; we do not yet know precisely how the illuminated scenes fit together' (Coogan 1987b:124, n 35).

# CHAPTER 4

## CULTIC ARTIFACTS, CULTIC SITES, AND BURIAL CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES IN THE HIGHLANDS OF PALESTINE ($12^{th}$ - $10^{th}$ CENTURIES BCE)

Four major types of cultic artifacts are found during excavations: altars, cult/offering stands, model shrines, and figurines. All (or fragments thereof), albeit in limited quantities, have been found at cult sites dating to Iron Age I, with the exception of the small limestone 'incense' altars, which appear to be a $10^{th}$ century BCE innovation. Minor artifacts, some of which could have been employed in cultic settings, as well as domestically for non-cultic purposes, include chalices, serving trays, miniature vessels, incense shovels, and *kernos* rings (ceramic rings to which small cups or vases are affixed). The four major types of cultic artifacts will be described and some of the unique finds will be discussed in more detail. Since these major artifacts were manufactured specifically for cult use, they may be regarded as 'tangible, physical expressions of shared beliefs' (Zevit 2001:267).

The discussion which follows is largely confined to cultic sites from the so-called period of the Judges (Iron Age I). Although the Arad temple is located in the Negev (ie, it falls outside of the hill country), it has been included since it is generally regarded as the only Israelite temple ever found. Several sites from the United Monarchy ($10^{th}$ century BCE) have also been included, in order to show the changes over time with respect to architecture, cultic objects and choice of locations. In addition, the features of Israelite religion which show cultural continuity with Late Bronze Age Canaanite religion will be illuminated.

The Hebrew Bible and other ancient texts, as well as the thousands of excavated tombs, attest to the importance of a proper interment in the ancient Near East and insights into the burial customs and practices in Iron I Palestine are now possible.

## 4.1 ALTARS

### 4.1.1. Textual data from the pre-monarchic period

Although altars feature prominently in the Hebrew Bible, relatively few have been uncovered during archaeological excavations. The word for 'altar' used most frequently is *mizbeah* ('place of sacrifice,' from *zabah*, 'to slaughter for sacrifice'). Etymologically the term involves slaughter; however, in usage it was also applied to the altar for burning incense (Mitchell 1982:26).

Biblical texts tell us that the Patriarchs built altars and made their own sacrificial offerings without recourse to any priesthood (Gn 8:20; 12:6-8; 13:18; etc). While no information is given as to their construction, they were evidently built chiefly to commemorate some event in which the person concerned had had dealings with God. Moses is instructed by God (Ex 20:24-26) to tell the people to make an altar (without steps) of earth (*mizbah 'adama*) or (unhewn) stones (*mizbah 'abanim*), on which to make sacrificial offerings. The fact that this passage takes the form of an instruction to be passed on to the people, suggests that it (as in the case of the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the chapter) was addressed to each Israelite individually and not to Moses as their representative (Ex 27), perhaps permitting anyone to perform this himself (Mitchell 1982:26-27; Halpern 1983:224). This would explain the altars built by men such as Joshua on Mt. Ebal (Jos 8:30-31) and by Gideon in Ophrah (Jdg 6:24-26).

According to the biblical text, the specifications of the two altars to be used in the Tabernacle were revealed to Moses by God at Sinai: the altar of burnt-offering (Ex 27:1-10; square, with horns and made of bronze-coated acacia wood (the metal translated as 'bronze' was probably copper; Gooding 1982:1157)); and the altar of incense (Ex 30:1-10; also square and with horns and made of acacia wood, but smaller and this time covered with gold). King and Stager (2001:339) have suggested that the horns 'may be stylized representations of *massebot*, symbolizing the deity.' The horns were considered to be the holiest parts of the altar; to remove them would desecrate the altar (Am 3:14).

### 4.1.2 Archaeological data

#### *4.1.2.1 Large altars*

There seem to have been two kinds of burnt-offering altars: those associated with a temple where, in the ancient Near East religious purview, God dwelled; and independent burnt-offering altars (ie, not associated with a temple), apparently part of the *bamah* or high place where sacrifices were offered (eg, 1 Ki 3:4). In addition to those from Mt. Ebal, Shechem and, possibly, the 'Bull Site,' as well as the Arad temple (see below), large altars, or fragments thereof, have been found at Beersheba, Dan, Megiddo, on the slope below ancient Zorah and, more recently, in the Shiloh area.

The Beersheba four-horned altar (1.60 x 1.56m and, on average, 1.12m high, to the top of the horns; 3.5 x 3.5 x 2.5 cubits, when converted to the common cubit (45cm; Zevit 2001:301)) was discovered by Yohanan Aharoni (1974:2-5). Although post-dating the so-called period of the Judges, it is significant in as much as it was the first archaeological confirmation of biblical references to the legal custom by which people could claim sanctuary by 'clinging to the horns' of a large altar, as Adonijah did in David's sanctuary (1 Ki 1:50) or as the Israelites are said to have done earlier in the 'cities of refuge' (Nm: 9-34; Dt 4:41-43). Note, also, that this earth-filled altar was manufactured from hewn stones, in violation of the specific rule of Exodus 20:22 prohibiting the use of such stones. One of the stones has a deeply engraved decoration of a twisting snake - a symbol which was venerated in Israel from the time of Moses (Nm 21:8-9); a bronze serpent was worshipped in the Jerusalem Temple, until the days of Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:4; see 4.6.4.2). The snake was also an ancient fertility symbol widely known throughout the ancient Near East (Aharoni 1974:4). Each of the horns was carved as part of a special block that formed the top rim of the altar. It was not found *in situ*; its dismantled blocks were found in secondary use, as part of a repaired wall of the storehouse complex of Stratum II (8$^{th}$ century BCE). It is considerably smaller than the dimensions prescribed for the Tabernacle altar (Ex 27:1), especially since the dimensions (5 x 5 x 3 cubits) are given to the top of the altar, excluding its horns. Obviously, the date of manufacture cannot be ascertained exactly; a date in the late 10$^{th}$ to early 9$^{th}$ century is

supported by the stratigraphic evidence at the site. By the end of the 9th century, it no longer existed, its individual stones having been incorporated into various construction projects. Aharoni (1974:6) has suggested that the deliberate destruction of the Beersheba altar was possibly the work of Hezekiah in the late 8th century BCE (cf 2 Ki 18:4).

Several stones cut in the shape of 1/8 segments of a sphere, the shape of altar horns, have been found at Megiddo (Zevit 2001:306). These are presumed to have stood in the large open courtyard of a temple during the last part of the 10th century BCE. A single, large, well-carved horn, presumably originally a corner of a much larger, hewn altar used for animal sacrifices in either the 10th or 9th century BCE, was found in close proximity to Bamah B at Dan (Biran 1980:176; Zevit 2001:302).

The existence of Manoah's altar (see Jdg 13) has been known for many years. In his entertaining description of a 10-day trip as early as April 1924, undertaken for the purposes of conducting 'archaeological research above ground,' Albright (1924:2,9) mentions his visit to 'the so-called Altar of Manoah' on the slope below ancient Zorah (Jdg 13:2), describing it as 'an extremely interesting rock altar of ancient, perhaps early Israelite date, with the characteristic three stages of the Phoenician and Jewish altar.' Manoah's altar has many of the features of the large, nearly square, four-horned altar (ca 2.4m on each side; similar in size to the altar of the desert Tabernacle (Ex 27:1-2)) recently discovered by Doron Nir-Zevi (Elitzur & Nir-Zevi 2004:35-39) in the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria) about 1.5km from Shiloh, the administrative and religious centre of the Israelite tribes according to the Book of Judges. The newly discovered altar was hewn out of Cenomanian limestone which, being soft, has unfortunately led to later erosion. Because it sits on a slope, the height of the altar varies (in the northeast, it is ca 1.5m high). A piece of blackened rock, found about 0.9m from its base, suggests that the altar was used for animal sacrifice. The rock appears to have been part of the upper layer of the altar top and it shows clear evidence of having been burnt at a very high temperature. No settlement was found in the immediate vicinity. However, within a radius of about 3km, there are some 20 ancient sites, including Shiloh. The absence of organic material and relevant pottery sherds makes dating of the altar difficult (Elitzur & Nir-Zevi 2004:35-36).

In contrast to the altars condemned in the Hebrew Bible, which apparently were built atop hills, this altar was built about halfway down the slope of the hill suggesting that it may be an

early Israelite altar. In addition, it bears striking similarities to the description in Exodus and, as in the case of the Mt. Ebal altar (see 4.6.3), as well as Manoah's altar, its corners are oriented to the cardinal points of the compass. Although Minoah's altar lacks horns, Elitzur and Nir-Zevi (2004:38) see it as a 'twin' of their altar: they have similar dimensions, with bases slightly wider than their tops, and both are built on the mid-slope of a hill. Part of the top of Manoah's altar, however, is raised and contains small cup marks, some of which are interconnected. Only three rock-hewn altars are known: this one from the Shiloh area; Manoah's altar; and one from Samaria (Sebaste). The Mt. Ebal altar is built of squared stones, while a few large burnt-offering altars built of stones and bricks have been found, the most noteworthy being the altar (2.5 x 2.5 x 1.5m) in the courtyard of the Israelite temple at Arad and the course of stones found at Shechem (possibly 'the house of El-berith' (Jdg 9:46); Elitzur & Nir-Zevi 2004:38).

Although the altar found near Shiloh, as well as those from Mt. Ebal and Zorah, are not associated with temples, it may be noted that the corners of the altars of Mesopotamian temples are mostly oriented to the four points of the compass. The Tabernacle and the Israelite temple described in the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, are oriented east-west. This holds true for the temples discovered in ancient Israel and in neighbouring countries, with the exception of that from Shechem, whose front was oriented roughly $30^0$ north of west (Elitzur & Nir-Zevi 2004:38-39).

*4.1.2.2 Small altars*

More than 50 of these altars have survived from Iron Age Palestine: each is square, carved from a single stone, small (ie, they are all moveable, at least in theory), and they each have a depression on the top. Some have horns at the upper corners, others do not. They are all, however, from the $10^{th}$ century or later and are generally referred to as 'incense altars,' because they match the description of the small altar designed for the Tabernacle (Ex 30:1-5; 37:25-28). Fowler (1984:184) has pointed out that they may have simply been used as braziers for heating in winter; in addition, even if they were used as incense burners, the burning of incense may have had no religious significance. Braziers are mentioned in the

Hebrew Bible: King Jehoiakim (ca 608-598 BCE), for example, is said (Jr 36:22-23) to have had a fire in a brazier in his winter house in the ninth month (Kislev, ie, in mid-winter). Even if incense was thrown on fires in braziers, this hardly justifies the description of such an object as an 'incense burner.' Braziers have been excavated from the throne rooms of the royal palaces of Kilamuwa and Barakib in Syria (ca 9th - 8th century BCE). Incense had, and still has, a number of uses in the Near East, many of which have no real religious significance. In the ancient world, incense was used as a healing agent, a fumigant, a perfume, or as a deodorant. Today, it is burnt in parts of south Arabia at the time of taking an oath, Bedouin have used it to fumigate the hair, semi-nomadic Arab women from the eastern Sudan use it as a perfume, the Jews of Yemen burn frankincense to assist labour during child birth and they burn it in funeral pyres, while the Iraqi Marsh Arabs use a portable hearth for cooking, heating, or keeping tea and coffee hot (Fowler 1984:184-185; 1985:25-27).

Haran (1978:230-38) has surveyed the 10th century small altars and has concluded that incense was introduced into the Israelite cult only about the 7th century BCE and that these earlier 'incense altars' were used rather for libations and grain display offerings. It should be noted, however, that his treatment of early Israelite religion is based almost entirely on literary analysis of the contents of the P material, which is generally regarded as post-exilic (6th century BCE), and he ignores the fact that evidence of burning has been found. In Zevit's view (2001:310, n 104), the 'incense altar' was used for different types of offerings, including incense - a conclusion which provides 'an opportunity to consider each of the small excavated altars as having different functions, depending on the state of the finds and their individual contexts.'

Significant cult sites at which small altars are attested are Megiddo, Lachish, Dan and Arad. Five 10th century altars (two from Building 2081), characterised by well-shaped, triangular horns, were found at Megiddo; a small altar, which originally had four short knobby horns, was found on the floor of Cult Room 49 at Lachish, encompassed by two sets of offering stands: one fenestrated and one solid; two small, hornless altars were found in the 9th - 8th century BCE altar room at Dan; and two small, hornless altars were found at Arad, associated with the Stratum XI temple (Zevit 2001:307,309,311).

Although these altars all post-date the so-called period of the Judges, the two altars of differing sizes found in close proximity at both Dan and Arad may be able to shed some light

on early Israelite religious practices. At Dan, the one altar is 30cm high, the other 43cm; at Arad, the smaller is 21 x 19.5cm, and 39cm high and the larger is 28 x 29.5cm, and 51cm high (they are otherwise identical in substance and design). Zevit (2001:310) has suggested that in both cases the presence of two altars, one larger than the other, may indicate that each was intended for a different deity, one more important than the other.

## 4.2 CULT/OFFERING STANDS

Although some of the stands may not have been used for religious purposes (see below), for convenience they have been grouped together under the designation 'cult' stands. Cult stands have been used from Mesopotamia to Egypt, as well as in parts of the Mediterranean world, since the Chalcolithic period and they come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and materials. The majority of those found in Palestine, however, are dated to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I (Devries 1987:27-28).

Biblical descriptions of cultic paraphernalia do not mention ceramic stands such as those found in cultic assemblages at Megiddo, Ta'anach, 'Ai and Lachish (see below). The two-piece ceramic stand, with its cylindrical base or pedestal (often cone-shaped) and bowl which sat on top, is the most popular type of offering stand (Devries 1987:28). On occasion, the pedestal and bowl were made in one piece, rather than two. Also popular was the ceramic stand shaped like a one-, two- or three-story house (easily recognisable by its square or rectangular fenestrations representing 'windows' and 'doors'). Although formed in the shape of shrines, according to Zevit (2001:316) 'their function as stands remains apparent.' The upper story was set back to accommodate the offering bowl on the lower level. Few bronze stands have survived; presumably they were melted down and reused (Devries 1987:29). Those still in existence have one of two basic shapes: a tripod and a square open work design. In the former, a ring-like base often connected the three prongs of the tripod base and supported a central shaft atop which sat a shallow saucer-like disc or basin. The sides of square bronze offering stands consist of open work, often depicting a variety of scenes (eg, the 10cm high bronze of uncertain provenance from Megiddo (Str V (?)), which features on each side a worshipper in a standing position offering a gift to a deity who is seated on a

throne; above the square base, a round frame provides a resting place for an offering bowl; Devries 1987:29). Limestone stands were either cylindrical or square (for the latter, see 'small altars' 4.1.2.2). The cylindrical types are similar to the cylindrical ceramic stands, having a pedestal and basin-like top. In some, the pedestal has a pillar-like appearance with decorated registers at various levels on the pedestal. The accompanying bowls may be decorated with petals and resemble the capital of a pillar (Devries 1987:28-29).

It was originally presumed that these stands were all used as incense stands, since the offering bowls of some display burn marks. In addition, since incense featured prominently in Israelite ritual, the incense burner was generally thought to be one of the artifacts used to confirm the identification of a building as a 'sanctuary.' The ubiquitous designation 'incense stand' is, according to Fowler (1984:185; cf 4.1.2.2), a 'misnomer' since some (eg, the stands from Iron Age Ta'anach) show no evidence of combustion and may simply have been used to support the bowls found with them. While the shape of many of the bowls indicates that they were designed to hold something, these stands may have been used for a variety of purposes, either sacred or secular: they may have been used as sacred libation stands, for holding sacred plants in agricultural rituals, or even just to keep food/drink warm (Fowler 1985:27-28). In addition, some stands have been found in secondary use (eg, the 'incense stands' used to make a drainage canal in Area H at Canaanite Hazor; Yadin 1975:113-114) and not in a *favissa*, the usual resting place for discarded sacred objects. In other words, even if they were used for incense, they were not necessarily cult objects and the discovery of an offering stand does not necessarily confirm the identification of the site as a 'sanctuary.' In addition, several of these objects have been recovered from private domestic dwellings (eg, the 'incense burner' found in a house at Tel Qiri ($12^{th}$ - $10^{th}$ century BCE)), suggesting that some may have been employed in private cultic practices (Fowler 1984:185). Plain ceramic stands are found primarily in houses, but have also been found in graves and temples. Zevit (2001:314) considers them to be 'a regular domestic implement which could be put to cult use.' The distribution of fenestrated stands (some of which display representations of plants, animals, and people/gods, in addition to fenestrations), on the other hand, appears to be more restricted. The various types of fenestrations used (rectangular, round, oval, and triangular) appear in Egyptian and Mesopotamian prototypes and are attested prior to the Iron Age in Palestine. Whether or not the shapes, sizes and placements of fenestrations had a particular

symbolic meaning is unclear (Zevit 2001:314-315).

The conclusion that not all were used for incense is supported by biblical texts and iconography (on seals, reliefs, plaques and tomb paintings depicting ritual scenes) from several ancient Near Eastern cultures. Although no depictions of offering scenes have been found in ancient Israel, the Hebrew Bible preserves literary pictures of cereal offerings (eg, Lv 2:1, where incense and libations are combined with flour; and Lv 2:4, where flour is presented in the form of a cake (cf Nm 15:17-21); presumably these were burned on an offering stand) and libations, such as wine (Ex 29:40, where a cereal offering with its libation of 'a fourth of a hin of wine' is mentioned), water (Ex 40:30), blood (Ex 24:6) and oil. Depictions from other ancient Near Eastern cultures (Devries 1987:30,32,34) show stands being used to hold many different kinds of offerings to a god/goddess: burned incense (to propitiate the god); water libations (perhaps to bring rain); vegetation (to make the land fertile); and cakes (to ensure a bountiful harvest). For example, a Babylonian cylinder seal from the Akkadian period (ca 2360-2180 BCE) depicts a worshipper pouring a libation into a cylindrical stand, while the second register from the top of a reconstructed limestone stele has two nearly symmetrical scenes in which Ur-Nammu, the Sumerian king of Ur (ca 2250-2233 BCE) offers a libation to a palm tree growing from a cylindrical offering stand (Devries 1987:35). Other cylinder seals depict both cylindrical and house-shaped stands being used for grain and cereal offerings. Egyptian tomb paintings frequently depict offering stands (mainly cylindrical) being used for a wide variety of offerings, including different types of fruits, parts of plants, waterfowl, fish, small animals, or the leg of an animal such as a sheep or goat. While one or two gifts seem to be characteristic of the Mesopotamian offering scenes, in Egyptian scenes the offering stands are usually heaped to the limit (Devries 1987:30,34-35).

With respect to cult stands from the sites described below, at several of these sites a recurring pattern is the pairing of a fenestrated with a plain stand (Zevit 2001:315-316). In the cult rooms at 'Ai and Megiddo, a fenestrated stand with its accompanying bowl was paired with a plain one, while at Lachish, two fenestrated stands were paired with plain stands. Pavement 3275, south of the cult room at Hazor, also yielded a fenestrated stand paired with a plain one, suggesting that it, too, was a place of religious activity. The significance of this 'twoness,' however, remains unclear.

## 4.3 MODEL SHRINES

Realistic models of buildings used for cultic purposes (*naoi*; singular, *naos*, a Greek word meaning 'temple' or 'inner sanctum') are not unique to early Israel and were used in many ancient Near Eastern cultures for a period of about 2000 years. They are known from Uruk, Nippur and Arad as early as the 3rd millennium BCE and later, in the Late Bronze period, from Ugarit, Kamid el-Loz, Hazor and Gezer (Zevit 2001:328-329). They were not designed to function as stands and from their architectural form they are clearly miniature 'houses for the gods' (eg, the *naos* from Tell el Far'ah (N) is only 30cm high; Dever 2005:221; the word *bayit*/*bet* in all West Semitic languages is translated as both 'house' and 'temple;' Dever 2008:57,59). In appearance they resemble up-ended shoe boxes, with the wall areas being significantly larger than the floor area. While some are empty, others contain built-in images of deities. It is quite possible that, when in use, the empty shrines would have accommodated a small image of the deity. Glyptic evidence from Syrian seals, however, tends to indicate that, from the end of the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic era, the god was indicated by an empty sphinx throne. Zevit has suggested that the actual identity of the god may have been 'indicated through stylized signs on the facade' or that, over the years, the shrines may have become 'conventional signs of divine presence' and the actual identity of the god would then, most probably, have been determined by local convention (Zevit 2001:329).

Several decorative elements, occurring singly or in various combinations, mark these models as shrines: two free-standing non-structural pillars, or a symbolic representation thereof, flanking the doorway into the inner chamber (the *cubiculum*); round 'buttons' placed either around, or over the entrance, or on the roof; and a 'fronton' (ie, a false front/high facade) which accommodated the symbols of the particular deity (Zevit 2001:329).

At times, model shrines have been a source of controversy, since many are sourced from the antiquities market and may have been looted, reducing their significance and depriving them of much meaning. Others are, possibly, forgeries. Neither the American Schools of Oriental Research, nor the Archaeological Institute of America allows these objects to be published in their journals or presented in papers at their meetings (Shanks 2008:53). *Biblical Archaeology Review*, however, rejects this view and does not consider these house shrines to be completely

worthless - a fact witnessed by, amongst others, the recently published article (Dever 2008:55-62,85) of a house shrine (probably 9th or, perhaps, 8th century BCE, possibly from biblical Moab and with the representation of a double throne inside, which was sourced from the Jerusalem antiquities market and which Dever (2008:55) believes provides 'significant support for the contention that the Israelite God, Yahweh, did have a consort,' who he feels is 'best identified,' as Asherah. He cites the Hebrew Bible's condemnation of the cult of Asherah, as 'some of the most powerful evidence for this contention,' as well as the fact that the *naos* features 'several symbolic elements often linked to Asherah, such as tree-columns, lion column bases and a dove perched on the entablature;' Dever 2008:55-56).

There is no description in the Hebrew Bible or even allusion to these *naoi* (model shrines). Apart from the square fragment of a large ceramic cult object from the 'Bull Site' (12th century BCE) which, according to Mazar (1982:36) was possibly part of a model shrine (see 4.6.2), the only recognised examples (neither of which contain an image of the deity) dating to Iron Age I from Israelite territory are the 12th - 11th century BCE *naos* from Dan and, possibly, the one from Tel Rekhesh (loosely dated to the Iron I period, since the circumstances of its discovery and archaeological context are unclear). Others have been found at Tirzah (Tell el Far'ah (N); 9th - 8th century BCE), Tel Rehov (from the early 9th century BCE stratum and not clearly Israelite) and Jerusalem Cave I (ca 700 BCE; Zevit 2001:336-338; Dever 2008:85, n 13).

The *naos* from Dan was discovered with domestic artifacts in a small room (Locus 7082; 1.5 x 1m; Area B; Stratum V, which begins in the latter part of the 12th century BCE; Biran 1994:151-153). In general appearance, it resembles the almost contemporary models from Ugarit and Deir 'Allah. Zevit (2001:336) has suggested that the entrance, which has two jar handles arranged symmetrically on each side of the entrance (perhaps acting as pillars), may not have been intended to represent a door, since it was not made at floor level; rather it 'may have been an aperture for light that could be blocked shut' (cf Ps 18:10-12). Courtyard 7026 revealed evidence of a metal workshop dating to the beginning of the Israelite period (Str VI). Stratum V (Courtyard 7061) contained even more extensive evidence for the presence of metal workshops, such as hearths, crucibles, a large quantity of ash and slag, while the end of a blowpipe was found *in situ* integrated into a furnace. A number of vessels (eg, sherds of *pithoi*, chalices and offering stands) were also found in the area. According to Biran

(1994:153), the presence of the large number of chalices, as well as the *naos,* suggests that cultic practices were associated with the metal industry and that, if this is indeed the case, the *naos* 'may well have been modelled after a temple.'

The *naos* from Tel Rekhesh (biblical Anaharath, in the tribal sanctuary of Issachar; Jos 19:19) is decorated with a series of clay buttons and the fronton has been shaped in such a way as to have a horned appearance (Zevit 2001:336-337,339). It most probably once had a door, since there are two holes drilled into the right frame of the entrance - perhaps, the *naos* had once contained an image which could only be viewed under certain circumstances - and, in place of pillar bases, there are two crouching dogs/lions.

## 4.4 FIGURINES

Figurines and plaques representing animals and humans (especially females), are generally the most common cultic artifacts in ancient Palestine. For example, during the first two seasons at Ta'anach, Lapp (1967:27) recovered more than 80 figurines dating from the 15$^{th}$ to the 12$^{th}$ century BCE. More than half of these are of the type dubbed by Sellin the 'Astarte of Ta'anach' (ie, nude female figurines with hands under their breasts). Terra-cotta zoomorphic figurines were especially common in 8$^{th}$ - 7th century Judean tombs (eg, those from Cave I in Jerusalem; ca late 7$^{th}$ century), while pillar-base female figurines were ubiquitous in Judah (although almost never found in the north) during the late 8$^{th}$ and 7$^{th}$ century BCE (Dever 2001:130,191-192). It is, thus, surprising that so few dating to Iron Age I have, as yet, been discovered. After all, three cases of image-making by Israelites feature in the Hebrew Bible during the pre-monarchical period (two of which appear in the Book of Judges; see also 4.5), which are neither condemned or only condemned during a later period (Miller 2000:19-20):

1) the bronze serpent, which Yahweh commanded Moses to make in the wilderness, which later became an object of worship and which was not destroyed until the reign of Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:4);

2) the ephod, which was made by Gideon (Jdg 8:27; although its character is unclear, a later Deuteronomic voice apparently viewed it as some sort of divine image and the people were condemned for prostituting themselves to it); and

3) the graven image (*pesel*, the same term used in the aniconic prohibition of the Decalogue; Ex 20:4), the ephod and teraphim, which Micah had made for his domestic shrine (Jdg 17:4; the only condemnation of this is the Deuteronomic note in Jdg 17:6) and which were later taken over by the Danites (Jdg 17:5; 18:17-20).

Figurines are common to Late Bronze and Iron II strata and yet, of the cult sites from the pre-monarchic period discussed below, the only figurines which have come to light are the bronze bull from the 'Bull Site' (12th century), the seated bronze male (possibly a war god and, if so, the only representation of a male deity from an 'Israelite' site, with the possible exception of the El-like stick figure carved into a miniature limestone altar from 10th century Gezer; neither, however, is necessarily Israelite; Dever 1983:574) from the Hazor Stratum XI cult structure (11th century), and the primitively-formed animal (possibly a horse or a dog) from the cult room at 'Ai (12th - 11th century). Even during the United Monarchy, figurines remain scarce: Bamah A at Tel Dan (late 10th or early 9th century) yielded two heads from broken male figurines; a pit in the vicinity of the high place (Locus 81) at Lachish (10th century) contained the head of an 'Asherah' figurine and two fragments of animal figurines; while the cult structure at Ta'anach (10th century) yielded a complete mould for casting Asherah or Astarte figurines or, according to King and Stager (2001:298), perhaps a temple/sanctuary female musician.

A variety of later Israelite contexts have yielded more that 2000 mould-made terra-cotta female figurines, depicted *en face*; the earlier examples hold discs (cf those which would have been produced by the figurine mould from Ta'anach; Lapp 1967:24) or, occasionally, infants. The disc has been interpreted as either a tambourine, a bread/cake mould, a drum, a rattle with serrated edges, a platter, or even as the sun disc (Dever 2001:193; Zevit 2001:270). Typical Late Bronze plaques depict a large-hipped Mother Goddess, with an exaggerated pubic triangle. Israelite figurines, on the other hand, are often more stylistic with the lower body being depicted as a pillar (hence the name, 'pillar-base' figurines; the pillar possibly represents the tree symbol which is often connected with Asherah). Zevit (2001:274) has aptly termed the female figurines 'prayers in clay.'

## 4.5 CULTIC SITES DURING THE PRE-MONARCHIC PERIOD MENTIONED IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Micah is said to have had a shrine in the hill country of Ephraim, in which he installed a priest from the tribe of Levi. The shrine contained a 'graven image,' a 'molten figure' (*pesel umassekah*; literally 'sculpture and something poured out;' ie, a statue poured from a single casting, in contrast to a statue put together from pieces; Boling 1975:256; Haran 1978:35, n 39), an 'ephod' and 'teraphim' (Jdg 17:3-5,12). It is worth noting that images of any sort are strictly proscribed by the commandments (Ex 20:4-6). The story continues with the theft of all of these from Micah's house by the Danites (18:18,20), who later 'set up the graven image for themselves' in the city of Dan, presumably at another cultic site (18:30; see 4.6.4 for the archaeological evidence from Tel Dan).

Gideon probably also had a household shrine at Ophrah, to house his ephod (Jdg 8:27), which he had made from the golden earrings of the Ishmaelites: 'one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold; besides the crescents and the pendants of the kings of Midian' and 'the collars that were about the necks of their camels' (8:24-27). The official priestly 'ephod' (Ex 28:15-30) was apparently an elaborate priestly vestment, 'the visible heavenly glory of the invisible God of Israel' (Boling 1975:160) and teraphim, divinatory equipment (cf Gn 31:19,34-35; 1 Sm 19:13; 2 Ki 23:24; Boling 1975:256). Presumably, the non-priestly ephod was also some sort of priestly vestment (Haran 1978:35, n 40).

If one assumes that the existence of cultic sites 'may be inferred indirectly from references to certain cultic acts carried out in particular places when those acts are of a kind performed only in temples, such as the fulfilment of a vow, or a community's entering into a covenant "before the Lord"' (Haran 1978:26), then several cultic sites, such as those at Bethel, Shiloh, Gilgal and Mitzpah, in addition to the one at Dan, are said to have existed during the pre-monarchic period. According to the Book of Judges, 'the ark of the covenant of God' was in Bethel 'in those days' (20:27). Albertz (1994:57) is of the opinion that the 'ark' (Hebrew: *aron)* was probably not originally a cultic object, but rather a sort of war symbol or 'standard which guaranteed the presence of God in battle' (Nm 10:35-36; 14:44; cf 1 Sm 4:3ff; 2 Sm 11); or, possibly, even a drum (see Le Roux 2009). It was not considered to be a cultic object until after it was placed in the sanctuary at Shiloh and, later in the Jerusalem temple, where it was

viewed as part of God's throne in the Holy of Holies, 'until the Deuteronomistic theologians gave it a new function as a container for the covenant document, the Decalogue' (cf Dt 10:1-5). Unfortunately, the details concerning when the site at Bethel was founded, have not been preserved in the biblical text; presumably, however, when Jeroboam set up the golden calves at the cultic sites at Dan and Bethel (1 Ki 12:28-29) and made them into royal temples (cf Am 7:13), they had already been in existence since the pre-monarchic period. No cultic remains have been discovered at Beitin (the site of biblical Bethel; Haran 1978:28-30)

The cultic site at Shiloh is said to have been installed after the conquest (Jos 18:1; 19:51; 22:19,29). After being moved from Bethel, the ark was housed at the temple at Shiloh, before being installed in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Sm 4:3-7:1; 2 Sm 6:1-19; 1 Ki 8:1-9), where it became the temple's most sacred object. The temple at Shiloh is depicted as 'the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was' (1 Sm 3:3; cf 1 Sm 1:9), 'making it the only house of God outside Jerusalem to merit this epithet' (Haran 1978:27; see 4.7.2 for the archaeological evidence for the regional cultic centre at Shiloh).

Samuel is said to have gone 'on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all these places' (1 Sm 7:16). Saul was made king 'before the Lord' in Gilgal (1 Sm 11:15) and, later, Gilgal was the place where Israel joined Saul and mustered for war against the Philistines (1 Sm 13:4-15) and where Samuel 'hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord' (1 Sm 15:33). The actual location of biblical Gilgal remains uncertain (Haran 1978:31-32). 'All Israel' is said to have 'assembled as one man to the Lord' (Jdg 20:1), lots were cast to determine who would 'go up against Gibeah' (20:1-3,8-10) and, later, the people went 'up to the Lord' to swear oaths (21:1,5,8) at Mizpah in Benjamin. The location of this Mizpah is possibly the village en-Nabi Samwill, on the highest ridge north-west of Jerusalem (Haran 1978:32). Jephthah is said to have spoken 'all his words before the Lord' (11:11) at Mizpah in Gilead, when he was appointed by Israel as their head and commander; it was here, too, that Jephthah made and payed his vow (11:30-31,34,39; Haran 1978:33). As Haran (1978:39) has pointed out, however, the cultic site in Mizpah of Gilead may have been a 'fictitious projection of the one at Mizpah in Benjamin.' Other possible sites include those at Hebron (2 Sm 2:4; 5:3; 15:7), Bethlehem (1 Sm 20:6; cf vv 28-29), Nob (1 Sm 21:1-10) and Gibeah of Saul (2 Sm 21:1-14; Haran 1978:34-37). The 'house of El-berith' in Shechem and the Arad temple will be discussed in 4.7.1 and 4.7.10, respectively.

## 4.6 OPEN-AIR CULTIC SITES

High mountains played a role in both Canaanite and Israelite religious ideology. Several references are made in the Hebrew Bible, from the so-called Patriarchal narratives until the reform of Josiah (in the late 7th century BCE), of the practice of cult in open places, and 'high places' *(bamot*), sacred stones (*massebot*), and *'asherim* (possibly sacred wooden pillars) are to be found 'upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree' (Dt 12:2-3; cf 1 Ki 14:23; 2 Ki 16:4; 17:10-11; Is 65:7; Jr 2:20; 17:2; Ezk 6:13; 20:28; Hs 4:13).

The exact meaning of the word *bamah* is still open to debate. While it is generally agreed that it is an open-air cult place of some sort (etymologically, the word derives from 'body' and, metaphorically, from 'mountain ridge'), Nakhai (1994:19) has recently pointed out that a *bamah* is not *only* a 'high place.' The rendering of *bamah* as *excelsus* in the Vulgate, which led to the English translation 'high place,' is rather simplistic; the word *bamah* has a variety of meanings and includes a platform for rituals, an altar and a temple. The Hebrew root *bmh* has cognates in several Semitic languages (Ugaritic: 'the back of a body'; Akkadian: 'back' in the singular, but referring to 'terrain' (possibly hilly) in the plural). It is interesting to note, however, that these cognates lack sacred associations (Nakhai 1994:19-20). Gray (1965:259) has pointed out that the Ugaritic meaning of *bamah* is far more suitable for a verse such as Deuteronomy 33:29, which would then be translated as 'Your enemies shall come fawning to you; and you shall tread upon their backs.' Emerton (1997:118) is of the opinion that the word in both Ugaritic and Akkadian has an even more inclusive meaning and 'seems to refer to the torso or trunk [including the back, chest and side]' since, for example, the Ugaritic texts tell us that, on hearing of Ba'al's death, the chief god Ilu (El) 'laments and gashes himself on the chest [*aplb*] and the *bmt*.' The word *bmt* as used here 'is unlikely to mean "back," unless he was a contortionist.'

The earliest, and fullest, references to *bamot* in the Hebrew Bible are to be found in the Book of Judges and the word *bamah* refers to a specific sacred *place* or *structure* (Nakhai 1994:20). *Bamot* were, not surprisingly for the tribal period, essentially local phenomena suited to the needs of individual worshipping groups. They are generally portrayed as being elevated and could be either within or outside of settlements. We are told that Samuel, who officiated at a

*bamah*, in or near an unnamed city in the district of Zuph, was approached by Saul for help in locating his father's lost asses. That the *bamah* was elevated is clear from the fact that Samuel 'came down' from it to meet with Saul (1 Sm 9:11-25). Later Saul is told by Samuel to go to 'the hill of God,' where he will 'meet with a band of prophets coming down from the *bamah'* (1 Sm 10:5). Throughout David's reign (10th century BCE), and even up to the time of Solomon's construction of the Jerusalem Temple, biblical texts make it clear that the *bamah* was, for the most part, an accepted place for Israelite worship (see, eg, 1 Ki 3:2-5).

Altars (*mizbehot*) are a special feature of the Patriarchal narratives such as those erected in the open, close to Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron and Beersheba. At least one had a *massebah* (standing stone ('pillar of stone;' Gn 35:14)), while some were erected near a sacred tree (Gn 12:6-7; 13:18). However, archaeology has revealed few sites of this nature in ancient Palestine. Presumably most were destroyed by erosion, human activity and the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, which were aimed primarily at the dismantling of 'the high places and the altars.' The main difficulty in trying to identify an archaeological site as a *bamah* is the fact that, although the Hebrew Bible frequently mentions *bamot*, it does not give a clear answer as to whether or not every *bamah* had an altar, a *massebah*, an *'asherah* or any other distinguishing characteristic, or whether every sanctuary could be described as a *bamah* (Emerton 1997:129).We are told, for example, that a *bamah* could be 'built' (1 Ki 11:7; 14:23; 2 Ki 21:3), 'made' (2 Chr 21:11) or even 'broken down' (2 Ki 23:8; 2 Chr 31:1). According to Emerton (1997:121): 'That implies that a *bamah* had, sometimes at least, structures made by people and capable of being destroyed' and one of the *bamot* mentioned is, in fact, described as having had a building (1 Sm 9:22, where the *bamah* associated with Samuel had a hall where people ate a meal together); it remains unknown, however, whether they all had a building or buildings. Presumably *bamot* did not exist 'on every high hill and under every green tree' (1 Ki 14:23); nevertheless, they appear to have been common and many were probably simple; but just how simple we do not know (Emerton 1997:123). Ackerman (1992:175) is of the opinion that the mention of a *bamah* 'may not necessarily indicate a location on a hill or mountain, the converse, a reference to a hill or mountain where cultic activities take place, certainly suggests a *bamah*.' As Emerton (1997:129) has concluded: 'Perhaps the wisest policy is simply to regard any local sanctuary as possibly a *bamah* but to recognise that we cannot be certain.'

Coogan (1987a:2-3) has proposed four basic, somewhat overlapping, criteria (in the absence of decisive written evidence) for assigning a cultic function to archaeological remains; the more criteria being present the more probable is the assignment of a cultic function. These criteria would seem to be particularly useful for determining whether or not an open-air site served a cultic function.

### 4.6.1 Criteria for cultic interpretation

#### *4.6.1.1 Isolation*

In most cultures, the holy and the profane are consciously separated. From an architectural point of view, this is manifested by a *temenos* (an enclosed sacred space) wall between the holy place and its immediate environment (whether settled or not). Such dividing walls are well attested in the ancient Near East in both archaeological and literary sources (eg, the Ein Gedi Chalcolithic shrine, the Megiddo complex in Area BB, and Tell Qasile Stratum X; Coogan 1987a:2).

#### *4.6.1.2 Exotic materials*

Due to their special function, cultic sites will usually produce material atypical of other sites (eg, miniature vessels, figurines and rare or expensive objects). It is acknowledged that exotic objects need not indicate a cultic site and may have been used in private rituals. In addition, exotic objects such as 'incense' burners did not necessarily have a cultic function (Fowler1984; 1985; see 4.1.2.2). However, while elements of the normal repertoire (especially, domestic material such as cooking pots) are likely to occur where the cultic site was regularly served by personnel, the proportion of exotic objects from cultic sites will always be higher than in assemblages from other contexts (Coogan 1987a:2-3).

*4.6.1.3 Continuity*

This criterion applies only to multi-period sites. Sacred areas at multi-period sites traditionally remain sacred. Modern examples of traditionally holy places include the Temple Mount (Haram esh-Sharif) in Jerusalem (used virtually continuously for three millennia) and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (used for at least the past two millennia). Archaeological examples include the Megiddo BB complex (in use from Early Bronze I to Iron I), the sanctuaries at Beth-shan (Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages), and the Fosse Temples at Lachish (the entire Late Bronze Age, from the early 15$^{th}$ to the 12$^{th}$ centuries BCE; Coogan 1987a:3).

*4.6.1.4 Parallels*

Cultic sites used for similar functions (especially, but not only, when they are contemporary) are likely to display similar features (known from written or non-written sources), such as the same general plans, similar placements of altars, and the like (Coogan 1987a:3).

In recent years, archaeologists have uncovered several open-air cult sites that may qualify as *bamot*.

**4.6.2 The 'Bull Site'**

*4.6.2.1 The site*

A chance find of a bronze figurine of a young bull, presumably the deity's attribute animal, led to the discovery by Amihai Mazar (1982:27-42; 1983:34-40) in 1981 of an open-air (possibly Israelite) cult site, on the summit of a high ridge (Dhahrat et-Tawileh) in northern

Samaria above (but not overlooking) the ancient road connecting the biblical towns of Dothan and Tirzah. A detailed archaeological survey of the ridge showed no evidence of permanent occupation, other than the cult place itself. However, the site proved to be at the centre of a number of tiny Iron Age IA settlements and may have served as a central ritual place for these settlements. Although the cult site was badly damaged by erosion, it has added significantly to our knowledge of biblical 'high places'.

The site was occupied for only a short period, before being abandoned, and the main period of occupation is dated to Iron Age IA on the basis of the pot sherds found, which included cooking pot rims (the most significant sherds), pieces of rounded bowls, the neck of a flask and disc bases of shallow bowls (Mazar 1982:32,35). A similar combination of cooking pot rim types was found at the early Israelite site at Giloh, dating to the same period (Mazar 1981:20-23). According to Mazar (1982:37-38), the 'Bull Site' is almost certainly an Israelite open-air cult centre and, if so, it is the earliest known example. It is the only one, other than the Mt. Ebal shrine, situated outside a settlement on top of a remote ridge.

The 'Bull Site' was built on bedrock and comprises the remains of a massive stone wall, which once enclosed an elliptical area about 21m from east to west and about 23m from south to north (Mazar 1982:33-35). At the eastern part of the enclosure, a large rectangular stone slab (0.55 x 0.97 x 1.30m) was found standing on its long narrow side on a pavement of rough flat stones. The stone slab is only slightly worked with the sides left rough and uneven, but it is easily distinguishable from the other large stones used for building the eastern wall of the enclosure. Mazar (1982:34) has suggested that the stone slab is either a 'standing stone' (*massebah*; cf Gn 35:14) or a kind of simple altar which stood in front of the pavement. Confirming the cultic nature of the site, in front of the *massebah* (or stone altar) and among the stones of the pavement, were a few animal bone remains, possibly from sacrificial animals, a typical domestic flint assemblage, and a squared fragment of a large ceramic cult object which is either part of a square 'incense' burner (cf those found at Ta'anach, Megiddo and Beth-shan in Iron Age I and 10$^{th}$ century contexts) or possibly a model of a cult-shrine (of the type common in the Iron Age and found at Tirzah (Tell el-Far'ah (N)) and elsewhere). In addition, a folded bronze sheet containing a fragment of a bronze handle, which may have been an Egyptian-style mirror, was discovered. More significantly, the latter indicates that the bronze bull, although a chance find, is likely to have originated at the 'Bull Site' - both are in

an excellent state of preservation and the *terra rossa* soil of the site is well known for its good preservation of bronze (Mazar 1982:35-36).

*4.6.2.2 The bull figurine*

The bull figurine (17.5cm long, with a maximum height of 12.4cm) is unique (being neither totally naturalistic nor totally schematised), the largest yet found in Israel (and the entire Levant), and may have been used in some religious ritual during the so-called period of the Judges in the land assigned to the tribe of Manasseh (Mazar 1982:27). It can stand on its feet without support or tang and was made by the *cire perdue* ('lost wax') technique; the site of the opening for the smelted bronze at the top of the neck can still be seen. Each pair of legs was moulded as a separate long strip which was bent above the body of the animal, creating a ridge on its body and back which continues the line of the legs. The rounded eyes have protruding ridges around depressions which may have once held inlays of glass or semi-precious stones; such inlaid eye sockets are unknown on other bronze animal figurines from the Levant. Based on the fact that the figurine shows a combination of stylistic features: naturalistic (eyes; ears; horns; legs; and detailed genitals) and stylized and schematic (the rectangular body; triangular breast; flat neck; the triangular head when viewed from the front, which is narrow and schematic when observed from the side; and the straight slot mouth at the flat bottom of the head), Mazar (1983:38) feels that the figurine is 'probably the product of a local, non-professional artisan lacking a defined artistic heritage.'

The small hump on its back above its forelegs, the shape of the horns and the thin legs identifies it as a Zebu bull (*Bos indicus*), which is known to have originated in India and reached the Near East as early as the 4$^{th}$ millennium BCE; bones of such bulls have been excavated (eg, at Deir 'Alla in the Jordan Valley) and the bull motif is extremely common in Near Eastern iconography from the Middle Bronze Age onward (eg, in depictions from Mesopotamia of the 4$^{th}$ millennium and in Egyptian art from the New Kingdom onwards; Mazar 1982:29). It is a symbol of power and fertility and appears either as a cult object itself or as an attribute of the West Semitic storm god Hadad (Ba'al). The worship of the bull as a symbol of a deity is depicted on a fresco from Mari, where the bull strides on top of

mountains; on a stela from Ebla; on cylinder seals of the Syrian style; and on a Hittite relief from Ala'a Huyuk where a royal couple is shown in prayer before a bull standing on an altar (all second millennium BCE; Mazar 1982:30). When the bull appears as the attribute of the storm god, the god is sometimes shown holding the bull with reins (a motif common to Middle Bronze Age Syrian seals and, more rarely, on Late Bronze Age seals). In other depictions, the god is standing on a bull. Three Iron Age Aramaean stelae (from Arslan Tash, Carchemish, and Til Barsip) display this motif, as does an Assyrian rock relief from Maltai although, in the latter case, the storm god appears as part of a larger group of gods (Mazar 1982:32).

No free-standing bull appears amongst the thousands of bronze figurines (early second millennium) that have been found at Byblos, although two show striding gods on the backs of bulls. The closest to this figurine, chronologically and geographically, are the two Late Bronze Age bronze bull figurines found respectively at Ugarit and Hazor, both of which show naturalistic features. The Ugarit bull figurine (6.5cm in length) was found in a cache together with a bronze figurine of a sitting male god and two bronze figurines of striding gods. It stands on a flat base with a pointed plug at its bottom which was used to attach it to a larger base or, perhaps, to a sceptre (Mazar 1982:29). The Hazor bull (5.5cm in length; from Stratum IA (13$^{th}$ century BCE) in the Area H temple; Yadin 1975:84), on the other hand, is strikingly similar in design to the bull from this cult site in that the front legs are connected above the back to create the hump and it has a triangular head and a stylized straight-line mouth. Extensions from the hooves originally secured the figure to another object, perhaps a cult pedestal or a stand. The majority of other known bronze bull figurines from the Levant (all smaller than 10cm in length) are fashioned in a crude and schematic style (Mazar 1982:29).

Whether or not the bull was obtained through trade with the Canaanite population of the villages of northern Israel or manufactured locally by an Israelite craftsman (the existence of metal artists among the Israelites is mentioned in the Book of Judges (17:4-5)), based on Canaanite traditions, remains an open question. Evidence from Megiddo, Beth-shan and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh has demonstrated that Canaanite metallurgy continued during the Iron Age, while the bronze figurine of a sitting male god from the 'high place' in Area B at Hazor may point to

the use by Israelite settlers of Canaanite bronze figurines with cultic significance[21] (Mazar 1982:32). Since the Zebu bull is not native to ancient Palestine and the figurine is stylistically of northern provenance, Ahlström (1990:77-79), has argued that the settlers probably included an intrusive, non-Canaanite group of northerners, in addition to indigenous people. There are indications that Hittites (after the disintegration and collapse of the Hittite empire), as well as groups of 'Sea Peoples' settled in Palestine and some of these may have settled in the central highlands. In addition, according to biblical traditions, Aramaeans may also have settled in Cisjordan (the patriarch Jacob, for example, although closely connected to the territory of Ephraim, is in the narratives associated with Aram (Gn 28:10-31:55) and is characterized as 'a wandering Aramaean' in the confessional statement in Dt 26:5). Since the figurine is neither totally schematic, nor totally naturalistic, Ahlström (1990:80) finds it 'hard to believe that a new [sic] settler, "a local Israelite," could have been inspired by a Canaanite artistic tradition that, according to Mazar's opinion (1982:32), did not exist in the country' (my insertion). Edelman (1996:51) has pointed out that Ahlström's approach 'is based on the questionable identification of the figurine as a representation of a Zebu bull,' but she concedes that if the figurine is indeed intentionally meant to represent a Zebu bull and that the 'hump' effect is not simply 'the result of the technique used to create the figurine,' then it 'could have provided valuable evidence for the settlement of people of northern origin in the Samarian hills in the

21 Finkelstein (1998:94-98) has redated the bull figurine to the MBA, on the basis of the discovery of what he considers to be 'MB 'Einun pottery' at the site and an MB parallel to the figurine. Mazar (1999:144) is, however, of the opinion that both arguments are fallacious. In his view (1999:146), the term''Einun pottery' 'remains enigmatic and ill-defined;' in addition, none of the small number of sherds found on the surface of the site included any of the forms classified as ''Einun pottery;' the bulk of them are, in fact, 'clearly Iron Age I.' Finkelstein's second argument is stylistic, since in his opinion, the bull figurine 'fits the cultural tradition of the MB better than that of the Iron I' (1998:97). His opinion is based on a figurine from an MBA context (ca 1600-1550 BCE) at Ashkelon; this almost complete bronze figurine of a young male calf (ca 11.5cm long and 10cm high; discovered in 1990) was originally covered by a sheet of silver and housed in a cylinder-shaped model shrine, with a beehive roof (Stager 1991:25-27). According to Mazar (1999:146-147), apart from the Ashkelon example, the only MBA bronze bull figurines known to date are those from Byblos (mentioned above); all three lack Zebu-type humps. He has pointed out, however, that a number of examples are known from the LB and the IA; in addition to those from Hazor and Ugarit, one was discovered at Beth-shan (Str S3), while four have recently been recovered from the LB palace at Hazor. The latter are all are about a third of the size (ca 4-8cm in length) of the bull figurine from the 'Bull Site;' two have humped backs and one of these has the front of its head executed in an almost identical style to that of the 'Bull Site' figurine (Mazar 1999:146-147). LBA and IA bronze bull figurines are known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, most of which show the humped back of the Zebu-type.

Iron I period, even though their original ethnic identity could not be pinpointed.'

The exact significance of the bull figurine and the identity of the god worshipped at this early Israelite cult site remain unclear. The figurine itself and the location of the site on top of a mountain can be related not only to the cult of the Canaanite storm god Ba'al (according to Jdg 6:25, a Ba'al cult existed among the Israelites during this period; cf Jdg 2:11,13; 8:33; 10:6), but also to those of El and Yahweh. In Dever's opinion (1990:131), the discovery of the bull shrine strongly supports the view of Cross (1973) that Yahweh was still identified with El, the old high god of Canaan, during 'the formative period of Israel.' The bull cult is well known from the biblical traditions concerning the 'golden calf' (1 Ki 12:28). Scholars disagree as to the meaning of the cult of the 'golden calf.' Some, such as Cross (1973:73-75), claim that the calf was nothing more than the pedestal of Yahweh (cf the cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant in the Jerusalem Temple), while others, such as Haran (1978:29, n 28), feel that it had a deeper meaning as 'a symbol of Yahweh' (iconographic material supports both interpretations). The 'golden calves' erected by Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan, following the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon (1 Ki 12:28), could be interpreted as either a revival of an old practice from the early history of the northern tribes (Cross 1973:74), or the introduction of a new cultic practice. In the latter case, the 'golden calf' story in Exodus 32 is an anachronism with the intention of legitimising the opposition to Jeroboam's deed (Mazar 1982:40).

*4.6.2.3 Interpretation*

Coogan (1987a:1-2) feels that Mazar's interpretation of the 'Bull Site' as an open-air Israelite cult place 'is open to question both functionally and politically.' Not only could Mazar's *massebah*/altar be a fallen pillar from a four-room house or, perhaps, even a table, his claim that the squared fragment is either part of a model shrine or an 'incense' burner is less than compelling because of its small size. Coogan sees the enclosed area as little more than a dwelling for a shepherd or a residence for a family and its livestock. He agrees that the bull figurine was probably used in some ritual function, but not necessarily in a public one. When applying the proposed criteria, he concludes that a cultic function for this site is unlikely

since, apart from the bull figurine, it lacks exotic materials. In addition, 'the architectural evidence is too fragmentary to adduce convincing parallels or to indicate isolation.' Further, it is impossible to identify an Early Iron Age feature, site or artifact as Israelite without determinative written evidence (1987a:5-6). While Van der Steen (1996:67) concedes that the 'Bull Site' may well have been a *bamah*; she is of the opinion that it is impossible to associate it with any particular cult or religion, let alone an ethnic group, simply on the basis of the find of the bull.

Archaeology has produced few parallels to this open-air cult place. These include the cult place from Stratum XI in Area B at Hazor and the early phase of the cult place from Stratum XII at Arad (both Iron I), as well as the one found east of Samaria (Iron II; Mazar 1982:38).

### 4.6.3 The shrine at Mt. Ebal

#### *4.6.3.1 The site and the finds*

The second open-air shrine is located in the biblical territory of Manasseh on a high ridge (el-Burnat; Arabic for 'hat;' Finkelstein 1988:82) on the northeastern side of Mt. Ebal, the highest peak in northern Samaria, and was excavated in eight consecutive seasons from 1982 to1989 (Zertal 1985:26-45; 1994:61-66). Two strata were revealed: Stratum II, dated to the second half of the 13$^{th}$ century; and Stratum I, dated to the first half of the 12$^{th}$ century BCE. There is no destruction layer between the two strata, or at the end of Stratum I, indicating that the site was peacefully abandoned.

Stratum II apparently served as a cultic place for a nuclear or extended family and consists of the remains of a building with large quantities of ash and bones. Below it, and to the west, is a structure which resembles an earlier example of the four-room house-type (Shiloh 1970), supported by a revetment wall. Two Egyptian scarabs and a stone seal with geometric designs, all dating to the second half of the reign of Ramesses II, were found, while the pottery resembles the general Iron I inventory in the hill country with minor differences in types and quantity of vessels (Zertal 1994:61).

Stratum I shows a sharp architectural change and the site now comprises two enclosures within which a large architectural complex was constructed. The principal installation - which, according to Zertal (1994:63), is an altar for burnt offerings - is a large, rectangular, almost square structure (ca 9 x 7.5m, with a height of 4m), built of large undressed stones, filled with layers of stones and ashes containing numerous animal bones and was presumably stone-paved on top. It is reached by an ascending double ramp: one leading to the top, while the second (smaller) ramp is created by a ledge (about 1m below the top) which encircles three sides of the altar before continuing down one side of the main ramp. Attached to the structure on the southwestern side are two adjacent, stone-paved courtyards and, in and around the entire complex, there are many small, stone installations with quantities of burnt animal bones (Zertal 1985:30-33; 1994:61).

The cultic nature of the site is attested by: the choice of location (elevated and isolated); the architecture of the main installation; the absence of living quarters in the main phase (Stratum IB); the bone assemblage (mostly sheep, goats, young male bulls, and fallow deer - all 'kosher' animals which may be slaughtered and eaten (Dt 14:4-6) and, with exception of the deer, may be offered as sacrifices (Lv 1:5,10)); the special pottery inventory (approximately 70% are large collared-rim jars, 20% are jugs and chalices, whilst the balance are mostly votive vessels; only a small quantity of common domestic pottery such as cooking pots was discovered); the installations for offering vessels; and the existence a special area for storage *pithoi* west of the central building (cf the pattern discerned at Shiloh). Although figurines are a common find at Canaanite (Late Bronze) temple sites (eg, Hazor, Beth-shan and Lachish), as well as at the Philistine temples at Tell Qasile, none have been discovered at Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1985:34-35; 1994:61,63).

#### *4.6.3.2 Interpretation*

Zertal (1985:41,43) has suggested that the Mt. Ebal altar may, in fact, be Joshua's altar. The building of an altar on Mt. Ebal is described in two places in the Hebrew Bible: when the Israelites are commanded to build the altar after they pass into the Promised Land (Dt 27:1-10); and again when the unhewn stone altar is actually built (Jos 8:30-35). Whether or not the

main structure is Joshua's altar, Zertal (1994:63) remains convinced - based on its similarity with altars described in the Hebrew Bible (Ezk 43) and in Second Temple sources (eg, tractate *Middot* of the Mishnah) - that Mt. Ebal is a sacred *temenos*: a high place with a large altar for burnt offerings. The Israelite burnt-offering altar differs not only in size, but also in shape from those of the Late Bronze Age; the latter (eg, those found at the temples of Hazor, Shechem, Megiddo and Nahariyah) are all cube-like in shape and medium in size (1-2m each side). He suggests further that large burnt-offering altars were erected at central places, such as Gibeon, Bethel, Shechem and probably Dan, whereas at secondary sites, such as Arad, where a medium-sized altar lacking the special characteristics of the large burnt-offering altar has been found in Stratum X of the Israelite fortress (9$^{th}$ century BCE), smaller and less complex structures were used. That none of the large burnt-offering altar sites has survived may be attributed to the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah; the Mt. Ebal high place was abandoned long before the organization of the Israelite Monarchy and was thus excluded from these later reforms (Zertal 1994:63).

The Mt. Ebal site is able to offer some insight into the cult of the early Iron Age. That a considerable number of people would have been able to participate in the ritual is suggested by the choice of location, with its low southwestern *temenos* wall (enabling participants on the lower ground to the west to see the altar), and the size of both the enclosure and the storage area west of the altar. Presumably, a religious and political leadership was in place to control the site and the supplies. The Canaanite cult (as demonstrated at, for example, Nahariyah) was characterised by the practice of bringing offerings to a cult place and placing them around an altar (Zertal 1994:63-64).

Zevit (2001:250-251) has pointed out that the isolated, elevated, rural cult complexes at Mt. Ebal and the 'Bull Site' bear a striking physical similarity to the Aegean 'peak sanctuaries' of the Middle Minoan period (1900-1600 BCE). Features shared by these communal, regional cult sites, which were usually demarcated/surrounded by a *temenos* wall, include: being within a comfortable, and relatively easy, walking distance from settlements; having commanding views of valleys and settlements below; and originating in areas where both agriculture and pastoralism were practised, during a time when there was either no centralised political authority or the existing authority was uninvolved in local cultic matters.

Presumably, the Iron I cult places resulted from 'similar sociological conditions under similar

physical and technological circumstances' (2001:251). Zevit hesitates to speculate on any common development from the Bronze Age cult sites, although he concedes that such an origin is probable. In addition, 'what such places meant to any specific group in its own social, historical, and religious context cannot be inferred from what it meant to a different group or to a similar group at far removes chronologically.' He also suggests that, since biblical literary evidence implies that this type of cult site continued to exist throughout the Iron Age in Israel (see, eg, Ezk 6:13; Is 57:7; 65:7), many more such sites await discovery. In addition, the socioeconomic circumstances which gave rise to the Mt. Ebal and the 'Bull Site' sanctuaries are unlikely to have been restricted to these areas alone (Zevit 2001:251-252).

Aegean 'peak sanctuaries' initially appear to have been established and maintained by local settlers, before becoming more elaborate under palace sponsorship and control. They later declined in number during the Late Minoan I and II periods (1600-1480 BCE), a decline which presumably coincided with the decline of the elite classes that had sponsored them. In the light of the development of the unrelated Minoan sanctuaries and the fact that the composition of the local Israelite population remained unchanged, Zevit (2001:252) is of the opinion that the elaboration of the Mt. Ebal site (Str I) 'could be understood as resulting from the imposition of some outside, coercive authority on local practice' and he connects this with the short reign of Abimelech in the Shechem area (Jdg 9).

Sacred traditions tend to endure and, as early as 1920, Albright suggested that the Israelite altar had a Mesopotamian origin. Zertal (1985:38-39) has suggested that the stepped ledge and ramp of the Mt. Ebal altar reflect the architectural traditions of Mesopotamian ziggurats (well-known from the third and second millennia BCE). Like the Mesopotamian ziggurat, two corners of the Mt. Ebal altar are accurately directed toward the north-south compass points. Exodus 27:5 speaks of the Tabernacle altar built by the Israelites in the wilderness as having a 'ledge,' hinting that it, too, was constructed with a narrower block set upon a wider base; the altar of Ezekiel had a number of ledges, creating a stepped tower (Ezk 43:14) and also resembles a ziggurat. The distinctive ramp was, however, modified in the later Israelite versions: the latter were less steep and they did not have steps (Ex 20:26). The persistence of this architectural tradition of ledges and a ramp is suggested by a drawing of a description of the 1st century BCE altar from the Jerusalem Temple in tractate *Middot* of the Mishnah (Zertal 1985:38). Should there, in fact, be a close connection between the Mt. Ebal altar and those

described in Ezekiel and Second Temple sources, Zertal (1994:64) has also suggested that the site may be the source of the 'earliest concrete evidence of the Israelite identity,' since 'religious architecture is a good indicator of the ethnic affiliation and religion of its users.'

The specific character of this cult site, however, remains a controversial issue. Dever (1990:183, n 10) suggests that Zertal's 1985 report should 'be used with caution,' while Kempinski (1986:44) sees the site as nothing more than an Iron Age I three-phase village: the first phase featuring pits and silos; the second, a two- or three-room house in the centre of the settlement; and the third, a watchtower (ie, not an altar; cf the ancient settlement at Giloh, although here the tower had a solid stone foundation; the final result, however, would have been the same and both it and the Mt. Ebal structure could have served as foundations for superstructures; it should be noted, too, that the pottery assemblage at Giloh is closely related to that of Mt. Ebal Stratum II and that these two structures are the only public buildings discovered thus far at Iron I settlement sites in the central hill country (Mazar 1990a:84,89,92); Mazar (1990b:348-349) has somewhat hesitantly, nevertheless, accepted that the Mt. Ebal site is a cultic place of relevance to biblical tradition). Na'aman (cited by Zertal 1994:63) has interpreted the main structure as possibly being 'the tower of Shechem and the house of El-berith' (Jdg 9:46). Contrary to the biblical narrative, however, the site was neither burnt nor destroyed. Zevit (2001:200-201) has pointed out that the absence of common domestic/work animal bones (eg, horses and donkeys, attested at other sites in the area) from the bone assemblage, 'supports a non-domestic interpretation of the site,' while the species represented 'suggest that is was an Israelite site where certain dietary restrictions, known from biblical texts written long after the site was abandoned, were followed.'

Coogan (1987a:5-7) tentatively concurs with Zertal's interpretation of the function of the site as cultic: it is isolated from its immediate and its larger contexts; exotic material is present; and convincing parallels are possible. He, however, rejects the 'Israelite' designation: the mere presence of a site within a particular tribal boundary does not mean that it was either constructed or used by that particular tribe (in this case, Manasseh). And, as in the case of the 'Bull Site' (above), it is impossible to identify the site as Israelite (or any other specific group, for that matter). Collared-rim jars, for example, which were once thought to have been characteristically early Israelite are now known to have had a much wider distribution, being characteristic of the period rather than a particular group (see 2.3.3). In his opinion, the

rectangular shape and the ramp do not have convincing Israelite parallels. He concedes that the altar *may* be the altar mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but that it could just as well have been 'a local Canaanite shrine which was also (or later) used by Israelites, or at least that it was "Israelitized" in legal and literary traditions' (1987a:7, n 1).

Van der Steen (1996:67) is of the opinion that although the Mt. Ebal site is not identifiable as being associated with any specific religion or ethnic group, she has pointed out that the 'morphotypology' of the pottery would seem to confirm that 'some of the new settlements, like Mt. Ebal and possibly the Bull Site, may have had their origins in migration of people from east of the Jordan' (1996:68). After all, the comprehensive synthesis of archaeological surveys by Finkelstein (1988) has shown that the majority of the new settlements appear to have started in the east and then, only gradually, moved to the west.

### 4.6.4 The 'high place' at Tel Dan

#### *4.6.4.1 The site*

Another possible open-air cult site was excavated by Avraham Biran (1980:168,172-176; 1998:38-40) in the1970s at Dan (Laish; Tell el-Qadi; Arabic for 'Mound of the Judge'), which was founded in the Early Bronze Age in the middle of the third millennium BCE. The memory of the Danite migration, from the fringe of the southern Philistine territory to the northern limit of Israel, during the time when there was no judge in office (ironically, the word *dan* means 'judgement'), is preserved in Judges 17-18. After the death of Solomon, at the end of the United Monarchy, King Jeroboam I established Dan as a cult centre from about 920 BCE in opposition to the Yahwistic cult based at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Ki 12:27-30). According to Biran, the Danite migration and the conquest of Laish took place during the first half on the 12$^{th}$ century BCE and the first Iron Age stratum at Dan, Stratum VI, represents the first settlement of the tribe of Dan. This stratum consisted mainly of pits and silos of which 25, some of which were stone-lined, have been uncovered in Area B. Other silos were found elsewhere and were probably used for storage by the semi-sedentary

population who lived in tents (cf the Tent Camp of Dan (*mahaneh Dan*; Jdg 18:12)) or huts. Stratum V represents a period of sedentary settlement, during which houses were built, and, although this stratum was destroyed by fire in the second half of the 11th century BCE, the city was rebuilt almost immediately. Stratum IV may be dated to the 11th - 10th centuries and Stratum III to the 10th - 9th centuries BCE (Biran 1980:173-175).

*4.6.4.2 The* bamah *or 'high place'*

The large sacred area (*temenos*) was uncovered on the north side of the mound in Area T. That it was most probably built on the site of an earlier sanctuary is suggested by the discovery of a figurine of a goddess adorned with an Egyptian-style wig (second millennium BCE), as well as two other Egyptian cult fragments: the first depicts a person sitting cross-legged with the position of his hands suggestive of prayer; the second mentions the god Amun (Biran 1980:175). Three stages of development during the Iron II period can be distinguished: Bamah A, a rectangular dressed limestone platform (7 x 18m; ca late 10th or early 9th century), which was destroyed by a fire intense enough to turn the edges of the stones red; Bamah B, an almost square structure (18 x 19m; ca the first half of the 9th century), which was built (possibly during the time of Ahab) of limestone blocks dressed and laid in a similar fashion to those used in the monumental buildings at Samaria and Megiddo; and Bamah C (ca the first half of the 8th century), when a flight of steps was constructed (possibly during the time of Jeroboam II) leading up to the platform (Biran 1980:175-176). The *bamah* most probably remained a cultic centre after the Assyrian conquest, perhaps even up to the Hellenistic period as evidenced by the discovery of a Hellenistic votive inscription which reads: 'to the god who is in Dan' (Biran 1980:179).

Finds from Bamah A and its surrounds reflect a strong association with the Phoenician coast and Cyprus, are dated to the late 10th century or early 9th century, and include oil lamps with seven wicks, *pithoi* decorated with depictions of snakes, parts of 'incense' burners, fragments of a decorated 'incense' stand, the broken head of a male figurine, animal bones and a complete bar-handled bowl, with a sign resembling a trident incised on the base and containing bone fragments of sheep, goats and gazelles (Biran 1980:175; 1998:40).

Depictions of snakes were common in Egyptian iconography and were thought to ward off real ones (Shanks 2007:60) - a feature of Egyptian life which was apparently carried over into Israelite culture. Moses is said to have 'made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live' (Nm 21:9). Moses' serpent is referred to as Nehushtan[22] (2 Ki 18:4), a name not attested outside the Hebrew Bible and which 'is apparently a conglomeration of the Hebrew terms for bronze (*nehoshet*) and serpent (*nahash)*' (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000:405). It appears to refer to a cultic image of a deity of healing, especially for snake bites.[23] Copper and bronze serpents have been found in numerous locations in the ancient Near East (eg, the copper serpent with a gilded head (ca 13th or 12th century BCE; 12.5cm in length) from a temple in Timna and the solid gold cobra (dating to between 630 and 603 BCE; ca 20cm in length; originally part of a diadem and attached to the headdress of a statuette) from a palace in Ekron; Shanks 2007:60-61). According to the biblical narrative, Moses' bronze serpent, which was apparently associated with cult practices, was destroyed (along with the *bamot* and *massebot)* only during the reign of Hezekiah[24] (2 Ki 18:4). On the other hand, the snake decoration may simply identify the vessels as Danite (cf Gn 49:17, where the tribe of Dan is likened to a serpent).

A plastered basin with large flat stones at its bottom was discovered to the southwest. The plaster surface, which continues to its north, has a large jar sunk up to its mouth in it. Biran (1980:180) recognised its cultic context immediately and he later interpreted it as a place for water libations. This area has now been identified (Stager & Wolff 1981:95-96) as an olive

22 Joines (1968:256) sees no relationship between Nehushtan and Moses' bronze serpent, 'except by popular tradition.' From an examination of bronze figurines and ancient Near Eastern iconography on pottery plaques, reliefs and cultic vessels from sanctuaries or tombs, he concludes that Nehushtan appears to have had a Canaanite and Mesopotamian background (Joines 1968:246-250). This serpent is depicted as a fertility symbol and is associated with fertility goddesses and sexuality, water (the source of life), and the bull (a companion emblem of fertility). In addition, the serpent appears with doves on certain cultic vessels, as symbols of 'the rebirth of nature and the rejuvenation of life' (Joines 1968:250). Moses' serpent, an Egyptian symbol, on the other hand, was used 'as a means of sympathetic magic to repel serpents' (Joines 1968:256), a practice popular in Egypt, but apparently alien to Palestine and Mesopotamia (Joines 1968:253-254).

23 It is worth pointing out that Asclepius, the god of medicine in Greek mythology, is usually depicted with a and coiled serpent; this combination of symbols is used to this day by the healing profession.

24 Kristin A Swanson (2002; cited by Shanks 2007:60-63) has recently pointed out that, in her opinion, destruction of the Nehushtan (2 Ki 18:4) was not because it was as objectionable as the other condemned cultic objects; rather, by destroying an Egyptian symbol, he was demonstrating his loyalty to Assyria. At the time, Egypt and Assyria had been long-time enemies.

pressing installation, similar to those found in other temple or shrine precincts. In the jar were found a second head of a male figurine and a faience figure decorated with black stripes and depicting, on the left, a seated monkey touching its mouth with its hands and, on the right, the foot of a person/deity with a sceptre/stick beside it.

Bamah A and its auxiliary structures were most likely built during the reign of Jeroboam I (928-907 BCE), while its destruction may have resulted from the attack by Ben-Hadad (ca 885 BCE). When Jeroboam seceded from Judah and the Jerusalem Temple, after the death of King Solomon, he set up a rival sanctuary for the kingdom of Israel at Dan with a 'golden calf' and he 'made houses on high places' (*bet bamot*; 1 Ki 12:28-31). To date, no 'golden calf' has been discovered at Dan (Biran 1998:38). Biran (1980:175) has suggested that the *bamah* at Dan may have been part of 'a *bet bamot*' and, in his reconstruction of the area, the precinct contained various altars and platforms, but no cult building. The meaning of *bet bamot* is unclear, but it is possible that it may refer to a structure of some sort built on top of a platform or a Canaanite-style high place of the type mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible. Irrespective of whether the *temenos* area at Dan is/is not 'a *bet bamot*,' Stager and Wolff (1981:99) are of the opinion that 'some sort of building' stood on the platform, even though 'no foundation walls have been preserved on its surface' and they conclude that 'the physical arrangement of the sacred precinct, with its olive press and altar(s) in the forecourt, would fit the Palestinian pattern and would constitute evidence that a major cult building once stood on the great platform at Dan' (cf the Nahariyah *temenos*, Phase B, and the Area H temple at Hazor).

*4.6.4.3 Other cultic areas*

In addition to the large open-air *bamah*, well inside the city, a number of other religious installations (dating to no later than the middle of the 8$^{th}$ century BCE) have been discovered at Dan, clustered around the city's gate complex. Although post-dating the biblical period of the Judges, and even the United Monarchy, these installations bear witness to the enduring nature of popular religion. Between the outer and inner gates, bordering the city wall and beneath its collapsed debris (most probably destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III; 733/732 BCE), a

set of five basalt standing stones of differing sizes was found, in front of which was a bench or table (Biran 1998:44). At the western end of the line of stones was a single large stone that created a sort of niche for the standing stones. Votive vessels, including seven-wick oil lamps and incense bowls, as well as the bones of sacrificial animals found in the vicinity, point to these stones as being *massebot*. Nearby a throne-like dias built of hewn limestone blocks, with four round-socketed bases into which poles supporting a canopy could have been inserted, was discovered. The complex between the inner and outer gates may well represent archaeological evidence of 'a high place of the gate' (cf 2Ki 23:8). A second set of five *massebot* was discovered about 38m east of Dan's outer gate, abutting the foot of the city wall, while a third set was discovered just in front of the city's upper gate (Biran 1998:41,44-45).

About 18m from the city's outer gate three, or perhaps four, *massebot* were found on the accumulated debris of the Assyrian destruction. A basalt bowl, filled with ashes, resting on a flattened base was set in front of the largest stone, while two miniature jugs and three oil lamps were found in the vicinity. These finds indicate that the religious practices followed in previous generations had persisted (Biran 1998:45).

#### *4.6.4.4 Interpretation*

Applying Coogan's proposed criteria (1987a:2-3), the 'high place' at Tel Dan has an obvious cultic function: it is isolated from its immediate surroundings; there are a number of exotic objects; the site displays continuity; and parallels may be made (cf the olive oil pressing installation).

Biran (1998:45) has suggested that the large number of *massebot* shrines associated with Dan's gate complex may represent an aspect of popular religion, with the *massebot* being aniconic representations of the deity; no *massebot* were found at the main shrine, perhaps indicating that here 'less elevated symbols of the deity were unnecessary.' Outside the city wall, about 24m from the outer gate, is an unusual building complex, dating to the period before the destruction by Tiglath-pileser. While it may have served as headquarters for the guards securing the city's entrance, it is possible that this complex provided temporary shelter

for merchants or travellers (many of whom were not indigenous inhabitants) waiting to gain entrance to the city. In the latter case, the shrines at the gate would have catered for their religious needs, as well as those of Dan's permanent residents entering or leaving the city (Biran 1998:45-46).

## 4.7 OTHER CULTIC INSTALLATIONS

### 4.7.1 The Tower (*migdal*) Temple at Shechem

The Tower (*migdal*) Temple (or Fortress-Temple) at Shechem (Tell Balatah, near modern Nablus) was discovered in 1926 by the German excavator Ernst Sellin. Although not recognised as such, by either the original Austro-German excavators (1913-1934) or the later American excavators (the Drew-McCormick Expedition, led by G Ernest Wright; 1956-1973), it appears to be an example of an early Israelite alteration and reuse of a Late Bronze Canaanite temple and is, most probably, 'the house of El-berith' (Jdg 9:46; Wright 1965:123-138; Stager 2003:29-34,66). Judges 9 describes how Abimelech set fire to the temple and killed a thousand Shechemites who had rebelled against his rule. The 'house of Ba'al-berith' (ie, the temple of the 'Lord of the Covenant' (Jdg 9:4)) is apparently an epithet for El-berith. The excavators found no evidence of any destruction or cultural revolution, between the Late Bronze and the Iron I settlements, and thus concluded that the infiltration of the city by the Israelite population had been a peaceful one (cf the absence of any biblical tradition of a conquest of Shechem; Finkelstein 1988:81).

The construction of the temple was dated by Wright and Bull (the field supervisor of Field V, where the sacred precinct is located) to about 1650 BCE and, according to them, it was in use only in the Middle Bronze IIC period (ca 1650-1550 BCE; ie, too early to be linked to the Abimelech story) and they believed that, after a gap in occupation from about 1550 to 1450 BCE, Temple 1 was replaced by a much smaller and completely different temple (Temple 2). The latter thus became Wright's candidate for the temple of El-berith (Wright 1965:80-102). Stager (2003:31) believes that Wright and Bull were misled by two walls (5703 and 5704), which they thought formed two sides of a later temple (Temple 2; estimated roughly at 12.5 x

16m; ca 1450 to 1125 BCE). Discounting all the factors that led them to distinguish these walls from those above them, Stager comes to the conclusion that Walls 5703 and 5704 are simply the lower courses of the walls above (5903 and 5904), which belong to Building 5900, the so-called 'Granary' (an administrative building?; the Austro-German excavators, who had originally dug parts of the building, were also of the opinion that Wall 5703 was part of the building above it (Wright 1965:96)); Temple 2 is thus 'wholly illusory.' Temple 1 (exterior dimensions: 21.2m wide and 26.3m long, with stone wall foundations 5m thick) lasted well into Iron I, was not destroyed until about 1100 BCE and was large enough to hold the one thousand Shechemites. The multistory temple, supported by the thick foundations, was made of mud-bricks and timber and had two large towers flanking the entrance of the east side and which projected about 5m in front of it. Stairwells in the towers were used to reach the upper stories (or galleries) and the main hall was divided by means of three fluted stone columns into a nave and side aisles. The ceiling timbers used to span the columned hall must have been about 4m long, while windows may have been cut into the upper part of the walls of the central hall (or nave), above the rooves of the side aisles (Stager 2003:29,31).

In the courtyard in front of Temple 1, about 6.5m east of the entrance, stood a large rectangular altar (1.65m wide, 2.20m long and 0.35m high) made of earth and stone which had been flattened on top. About 1.8m east of the altar, which was probably used for animal sacrifice, stood an enormous stela of shaped limestone (*massebah* 1). It is 1.48m wide and 0.42m thick and, although it still stands about 1.5m tall, in antiquity (judging from the proportions of known stelae) it was probably twice that height. A stone socket with a groove 1.65m long, 0.45m wide and 0.40m deep was found nearby; presumably, it was used to hold *massebah* 1 upright. Two smaller stelae (*massebah* 2 and *massebah* 3) flanked the entrance to the temple (cf 'the pillars at the vestibule' of Solomon's Temple, Jachin and Boaz; 1 Ki 7:21). Stager (2003:31,33) has suggested that the most likely place for the anointing of Abimelech 'by the oak of the pillar' (Jdg 9:6) would have been in the courtyard of Temple 1 beside *massebah* 1; if the latter once bore an inscription on a plaster coating (cf Dt 27:2-4), no such inscription has survived. This courtyard is presumably also the setting for Joshua's covenant-renewal ceremony, between Yahweh and the members of the Israelite Tribal League (Jos 24:25-27). There is no direct archaeological evidence for a sacred oak; any tree pits with little or no organic residue would not have been noticed, using the archaeological methods and

recording techniques in use during the 1920s and 1930s, when the courtyard was excavated. Sacred trees (oaks) are known to have existed in the courtyards of Canaanite temples (eg, the tripartite temple at Avaris (Tell ed-Dab'a), the largest Canaanite temple ever discovered; contemporary with the influx of foreign migrants to the Egyptian delta and with the rise of the 15th (Hyksos) Dynasty (ca 1640-1532 BCE); Baines & Malek 1984:176; Stager 2003:34).

Several Canaanite *migdal* temples have been discovered. Temple 2048 at Megiddo, which remained in use until the 11th century BCE, is remarkably similar to the Tower Temple at Shechem; although smaller (ca 16.5 x 21.3m), it has two towers flanking its entrance, walls 3.5m thick and it, too, has a long and roughly contemporaneous history. Both were probably dedicated to the Canaanite god El. An even larger *migdal* temple (ca 24m x 32m; first built ca 1650 BCE, at about the same time as Shechem Temple 1) has been excavated at Pella, in modern Jordan. More recently, a much smaller temple (9m x 15.2m, with walls more than 2.4m thick; also dating to the latter part of the MBA) has been found at Tel Haror in the northern Negev (Stager 2003:66). It should also be noted that the two major temples excavated at Ras Shamra have recently been reconstructed (Yon 1994, 1997; cited by Pardee 2002:228) as tower temples. While most sacrifices would probably have taken place in the courtyards at the entrances to these temples, Pardee has suggested that some of the smaller sacrifices may have been offered on the flat rooves of the towers.

The Tower Temple was the main religious centre in the highlands of Canaan until its destruction in about 1100BCE. The sacred centre then shifted south to Shiloh, where it remained for the next half century until it moved permanently to Jerusalem.

### 4.7.2 The regional cult centre at Shiloh

Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun), the sacred religious centre of the Israelite population in the central hill country during the first half of the 11th century BCE, is located in the heart of the territory of Ephraim. It was first excavated by a Danish expedition, under the direction of H Kjaer, during three seasons in 1926-1932. The only Iron I remains discovered, however, were some collared-rim store jars in the northernmost of the two rooms found on the western side of the mound and a destruction level assigned to the mid-11th century BCE. It was not until the four

seasons of excavation (during 1981-1984), sponsored by the Department of Land of Israel Studies at Bar-Ilan University, that more light was shed on this period (Finkelstein 1988:207-211).

Two public pillared buildings (312 and 335), which were very precisely oriented along the north-south and east-west axes and which appear to have served as annexes to the cultic complex, were discovered on the western slope of the tell (Area C) (Finkelstein 1988:220,222,233). They contained mainly *pithoi* (the southern room of Building 335, for example, was almost filled with *pithoi*) and they appear to have been used to store the offerings brought to the sanctuary (see, 1 Sm 1:24). The building complex was destroyed by a fierce conflagration and, in support of the biblical description of Shiloh as a pilgrimage centre for the Israelites of the central hill country (see, eg, Jdg 21:12; 1 Sm 1:3), a large number of animal bones and Iron I pottery, which may have been the remains of offerings, was found amongst the accumulated debris on top of the collapsed roof in the northern part of Building 335. This debris was presumably dumped down the slope during preparations for new construction in the adjacent area on the east (in the direction of the summit). Two sherds bore animal figures in relief: a cooking pot rim features the head of a lioness and the base of a krater, a ram's head. In addition, fragments of a cultic stand bearing the applied images of a horse, a lioness, and a scene of a leopard attacking a deer were found (Finkelstein 1988:225-226).

The sanctuary of the Shiloh sacred complex (12$^{th}$ to mid - 11$^{th}$ century BCE), which is presumed to have been located on the summit of the tell, could not be excavated because of erosion and the extensive damage caused by later construction, especially during the Roman and Byzantine periods (Finkelstein 1986:39-41). Of the approximately 100 Israelite settlement sites known from surveys, 26 were found to be within a radius of about 5 to 6km ( Finkelstein 1988:201) and Finkelstein (1988:231) believes 'that Shiloh was the first inter-regional cult centre in Israel.'

Its choice as a central Israelite cultic site may be explained by the fact that there is a long sacral tradition associated with the site, dating back to the Middle Bronze II period; in addition, while territories such as that of Manasseh were settled with large well-established Canaanite populations, surveys of the northern part of the central hill country have revealed that, at the beginning of the Israelite settlement period, the territory of Ephraim was only

sparsely inhabited (Finkelstein 1986:40). There was also no real settlement at Shiloh during the Late Bronze Age. Following the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines (ca 1050 BCE), the sacred area moved southward and Shiloh lost its claim to prominence (Finkelstein 1986:40-41).

Dever (1991:82), however, has rejected Finkelstein's 'notion of continuity - especially in cult - from Middle Bronze into early Iron I,' as well as his identification of Buildings 312 and 335 as public cultic buildings, as 'nothing but wishful thinking, hardly worthy of the hard-headed realism Finkelstein exhibits elsewhere.' As Dever has pointed out, the archaeological evidence for this conclusion is extremely flimsy. Van der Steen (1996:67) is of the opinion that the Shiloh site is not identifiable as being associated with any specific religion or ethnic group.

### 4.7.3 Shrine 2081 at Megiddo (Stratum VA)

According to Schumacher (cited by Ussishkin 1989:49), shrine 2081 was constructed in Area AA as part of a massive Solomonic building project during the 10$^{th}$ century BCE. While many of the elements comprising the previous Canaanite town-plan were preserved (eg, the system of fortifications, the gate and the palaces), the 'sacred area' of Canaanite Megiddo, which had been in continuous use from the beginning of the third millennium until the beginning of Iron Age I, was completely eradicated. Shrine 2081 was discovered by Gordon Loud in the 1930s, near the city gate. It is part of a larger building with walls about 1m thick (thicker than all the contemporary dwellings; Ussishkin 1989:170-171). Two upright stones (ca 1.5m high) were found embedded in almost the exact centre of the stone-paved floor. According to Ussishkin they must have had a cultic, rather than a structural, function. Stern (1990:103), however, while agreeing that the shrine was undoubtedly a small cultic centre, feels that the central location of the stones, as well as their distance from each other, 'leave no doubt that they were intended for structural support' - in his view, they are simply stone pillars (ie, not *massebot*) like those in widespread use in hill country houses during the Iron Age.

Cultic equipment, which was found intact in a niche in the corner of the area which served either as an entrance hall or as a courtyard of the building which housed the shrine, included

square limestone horned altars, a limestone offering table with a round depression, two cult ('incense') stands (one fenestrated, the other, plain), a basalt three-legged mortar and pestles, and small juglets (Ussishkin 1989:172; Zevit 2001:316).

### 4.7.4 The Tell el-Far'ah (N) Level 3 shrine

Tell el-Far'ah (N) (biblical Tirzah) was excavated by Roland de Vaux in nine seasons from 1946 to 1960. Although he never published a final report before his death, in his short articles and excavation reports in *Revue Biblique* (cited by Zevit 2001:238) and on the basis of his findings, he reconstructed an 'open-air shrine' which included a *massebah* and a receptacle for libations, just inside and 3.5m to the east of the Iron Age city gate (cf 2 Ki 23:8; Stager & Wolff 1981:99-100; Zevit 2001:238-241). Level 3 (10th century BCE) featured a square pedestal base, which was situated next to a small hollowed-out stone basin, hewn out of a single stone. Above this structure (Level 2), he found a larger slab-lined basin (1.50 x 1.25m), lined with partially dressed stone slabs. The upper half of the sides of this basin protruded above the floor of Level 1, on which lay a rectangular, crudely dressed monolithic column (1.80m high). According to De Vaux, the monolith had originally been erected on the stone pedestal base of Level 3 and then reused in Level 2 and, finally, in Level 1. According to Graesser (1972:52): 'It would have been useful for oath rituals in the business and judicial transactions "at the gate" so often mentioned in the Old Testament' (Ruth 4:1; Gn 23:18). Since such a shrine would have blocked half the gate, Stager & Wolff (1981:99-100) have 'desacralized' the *massebah* 'to the less exalted status of an olive crusher' and have argued that the monolith and slab-lined basin - which they identify as an olive crushing installation (cf those at Ta'anach and Dan) - belong rather to Level 1 (and, possibly, to a domestic quarter in that level), the foundation for the pedestal and basin having been dug down through the debris of the earlier strata (ie, it was built only after the destruction of the city gate, some time after 722 BCE).

Zevit (2001:238), on the other hand, on the basis of the stratigraphy and finds 'supports De Vaux's conclusion that something stood in the open area inside the city gate during the Israelite period.' Since a pedestal and a basin were found in the open plaza of Level 3 (10th century BCE) below the uppermost pedestal and basin, the latter 'presumably filled the same

role at this spot as the lower ones had in an earlier period.' Citing such parallels as the basins/troughs found near/at the gates at Lachish (from the Persian Period), Gezer (in a chamber of the Solomonic gate), and Iron Age Ekron, he dismisses the interpretation of these basins as either olive crushing installations or watering troughs for animals and suggests that they were used, not only 'for personal refreshment, but also for libations or casual pietistic sprinklings over or before nearby standing stones' (2001:241).

### 4.7.5 The Ta'anach 'Cultic Structure'

#### *4.7.5.1 The site and the finds*

The 10th century cult installation at Ta'anach (Tell Ta'annek, 8km southeast of Megiddo),'by the waters of Megiddo' (Jdg 5:19), was first excavated by Ernst Sellin in the early 1900s and then by Paul W Lapp in the 1960s (Lapp 1967:17-21). The building consists of two incomplete rooms, the floors of which were covered with a destruction layer (possibly associated with Shishak's campaign; ca 925 BCE) averaging 75cm thick. In addition to two iron knives, Room 2 contained only masses of sherds, mostly of large jars which had been used to store grain. Room 1, which presumably had been a storage room, was filled with a closely packed mass of objects - some of which are clearly cultic. Finds included 140 astragali, which were initially identified by Lapp as pig astragali. It has now been confirmed that they are sheep/goat astragali (Hesse 1990:214). It is worth noting that there is no clear evidence for the cultic use of pigs in Iron Age Palestine. Even 'in those Philistine contexts where pigs are common, they are not found in temples or other special contexts' (Hesse 1990: 215). The astragali were possibly used for divination; although astragali have a long history of cultic use, their precise function remains a matter of speculation. In addition, Room 1 yielded more than 80 ceramic vessels (jars, jugs, juglets, pyxides, bowls, cooking pots, lamps, a censer, and a cult stand); loom weights (cf 2 Ki 23:7, on the basis of which one may presume were used to weave garments for a divine image), 58 of which were well-preserved, as well as many fragments, most of which were found in a very large crater; seven knife blades, a sickle and a javelin head of iron; three small stelae; and a complete mould for casting Asherah or

Astarte Mother-Goddess figurines (Lapp 1967:19). Graesser (1972:55-56) has suggested that the miniature *massebot*, although shaped like their larger counterparts, are too small to have served as standing stones for a public cult and are 'clearly secondary, derived, and symbolic in function.' They were probably used for private/individual worship, being 'cheaper, portable and easily reusable,' perhaps as 'stones of petition.' The most remarkable find is a large, square, terra-cotta offering stand, similar to the one found earlier by Ernst Sellin in the same area (Lapp 1969:42-44; see 4.7.5.2). Outside these rooms, but presumably associated with them, is a slab-lined basin (cf the one at Tel Dan) sunk into the floor 2m east of the storeroom (Room 1). A large monolith (ca 1.1 x 0.5 x 0.4m) had been found by Sellin lying nearby and, according to Stager and Wolff (1981:99), he correctly identified the basin and monolith as an 'olive press' or, more precisely 'a crushing vat with a crushing stone.'

According to Zevit (2001:237), however, the building at Ta'anach is not a cultic structure. In his opinion, the absence of benches, an altar or a display platform, as well as the largely domestic contents (other than the two elaborate cult stands), 'suggests that this is either a domestic or, perhaps even more likely, an industrial building.' As Stager (1985b:86) has pointed out, it is not even clear whether the inhabitants of Ta'anach in Iron I were 'Israelites' or 'Canaanites.'

*4.7.5.2 The cult stands from Ta'anach*

Of the cult stands mentioned above, the two most interesting ones are those from Ta'anach. Although they post-date the 'period of the Judges,' they are able to shed some light on the religious practices of early Israel. Neither, unfortunately, comes from its original context: the first, broken into 36 pieces and scattered over several square metres, was found by Sellin in 1902; the fragments of the second were found in 1968 by Lapp (1969:42), at the bottom of a collapsed cistern shaft, within 8 -10m of the locus of the first. Their proximity, as well as the similarity in both shape and motifs - although the Sellin stand is less competent artistically, since the animals portrayed are less detailed and sophisticated - would suggest that both were used in a dedicated cult place (Zevit 2001:318,320). Both have been assigned to the late 10$^{th}$ century settlement (the destruction of which has been attributed by Lapp (1967:19) to Shishak), on the basis of the pottery with which they were found.

The larger square stand found by Sellin (45cm long at the bottom, tapering to ca 30cm at the top, and standing 90cm high after reconstruction) has five registers of reliefs featuring symmetrically-arranged, alternating winged sphinxes and lions. A tree with four pairs of voluted branches, the top branches of which are being nibbled by the goat/ibex depicted on either side, appears between the two sphinxes on the bottom register. Between the second and third registers on the left wall of the stand is a relief of a male figure choking (or, possibly, supporting) an arched snake (Zevit 2001:318,320).

The smaller stand discovered by Lapp (a regular square 18 x 18cm and 54cm high, which tapers only slightly) has four registers in high relief at the front, also of symmetrically-arranged winged sphinxes and lions - although, the sphinxes of the top register are depicted only in profile on the stand's side, unlike the other animals on the stand (Lapp 1969:42,44; Zevit 2001:318,320). The central scene of the lowest register depicts a nude female *en face* and with arms outstretched, touching the ears of the lions flanking her on either side. The second register features a pair of winged sphinxes/cherubim, while the third register from the bottom, which is almost identical to that of the bottom register of the large stand, depicts two rampant goats/ibexes nibbling at the top of a tree with three pairs of voluted branches. The top register depicts a quadruped, probably a bull calf, standing between two stylized trees/free-standing pillars and bearing a winged sun-disc (uraeus) on its back. The back of the stand is plain except for fenestrations.

According to Zevit (2001:321), the nude female on the smaller stand 'is a *potnia therion*, a "mistress of animals" figure, a type with a rich iconographic history reaching back into Mesopotamia and extending forward into Greece.' The lion is a fertility figure, indicating that she is a fertility goddess (Beck 1994:368). Dever (1984:33, n 24) sees her as 'an astonishingly explicit portrayal' of the 'Lion Lady,' and identified her initially as either 'Anat or Asherah; he later (2005:220) emphatically states that she is 'obviously Asherah' - a conclusion with which Zevit (2001:323,324) concurs. According to Dever, the fact that the two winged lions with human heads on the register above appear to be wearing Hathor headdresses would appear to support this, since this headdress is regularly worn by the New Kingdom (1500-1200 BCE) Egyptian goddess Qudshu, 'the Holy One,' the Egyptian version of Canaanite Asherah. In addition, he is of the opinion that the 'Lion Lady' was of particular importance - both to the

Israelites and the Philistines - during the Iron I period in Palestine and he cites as evidence the well-preserved lioness skull found on the altar of the 12th century temple at Jaffa, as well as the lion-headed masks and *rhyta* found at the 11th century Tell Qasile temple of Stratum XI, as proof of the adoption of her cult by the Philistines (Dever 1984:33, n 24; 1990:136). The fact that the chief epithet of the male counterpart of the principal female fertility goddess in greater Canaan was 'Bull El,' may account for her association with cow imagery - something which would appear to be confirmed in the case of 'Anat by several texts from Ugarit where Ba'al, her consort, is said to have mated with 'a cow-calf in Dubr' (Dever 1984:27). The tree-and-goats motif which appears on both stands is widely attested in the ancient Near East, as an indication of the power of fertility of a variety of deities (Beck 1994:380) and it appears on two early Iron I stamp seals: one from Megiddo, the other from Beth-shemesh (Zevit 2001:322). Both stands have shallow flat surfaces on top surrounded by a raised rim. Sellin identified the larger stand as a '*raucheraltar*;' however, neither of the Ta'anach stands shows any evidence of burning or incense. Lapp (1969:42,44) has thus suggested that these stands were most probably used for libations; Beck (1994:380), on the other hand, has suggested that the flat surface of the 'roof' of the stands could have served as pedestals for either a statue of the goddess herself or her symbol.

The flying sun is a well-known symbol of divinity in the ancient Near East and it often appears on Iron II seals from Israel and elsewhere; presumably it marks the bovine below it as a divine figure. Unfortunately the divinity's identification is far from clear and it could symbolise either Yahweh or Ba'al or, possibly, even some other rain and/or fertility deity (Zevit 2001:322-323). Not all scholars, however, agree that the animal depicted is a bull. Two zoological experts, for example, have concluded that it is more likely to be a horse - and, 'if it is a horse, then it cannot be identified with Ba'al' (Taylor 1994:57). This conclusion is supported by such details as the animal's full tail, the placement of the erect ears, the shape of the muzzle and jaw and the large hooves. Although it does not have a mane, numerous Iron Age horse figurines (eg, the terra-cotta horse from Hazor; late 10th century BCE; Taylor 1994:58) are depicted without flowing manes. The two free-standing pillars depicted on the top register are typical of entrances to Syro-Palestinian temples. Even Solomon's Temple is said to have had two monumental pillars at its entrance (1 Ki 7:21). The juxtaposition of the horse, the winged sun disc and pillars recalls an incident involving Josiah who had sought to

purge the Temple of pagan practices (2 Ki 23:11). The identification of Yahweh with the sun is also supported by such passages as 'The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran' (Dt 33:2; Taylor1994:55,57-58,60-61). The empty space in the centre of the third register from the top is protected by cherubim, just as two cherubim are said to have guarded the apparently empty shrine (Holy of Holies), where Yahweh dwelled (1Ki 6:23-28), while their wings shielded 'the place of the ark' (1Ki 8:7). Taylor (1994:58,60) is, therefore, of the opinion that just as the second from the top and the bottom registers depict Asherah's symbol (the tree of life, flanked by goats/ibexes) and herself, so the other two registers appear to represent Yahweh's symbols (the horse and the sun) and the god himself (an abstract deity depicted as an empty space).

The motif of a (storm) god combatting a snake as depicted on the Sellin stand 'may allude to a creation myth in which the creator subdued a primal serpent' (cf Is 27:1; Job 26:13; 40:25-32) and it is well-known from other artifacts. However, as Zevit (2001:324) has pointed out, since the god is usually depicted wielding a weapon in one upraised hand, while holding an upright snake in the other, the 'two-handed throttling posture ... is unique and may represent Israelite artistic conventions or a detail from an ancient combat myth.'

### 4.7.6 The Hazor Stratum XI cult structure in Area B

Unlike Megiddo, where Canaanite culture continued into Iron Age I, Canaanite Hazor, which has revealed four monumental temples dating from the Bronze Age, was totally destroyed at the end of the Bronze Age. Above these ruins, an expedition directed by Yigael Yadin in 1968 discovered two strata (XII and XI) from the settlement period. Excavation of the 11$^{th}$ century BCE (Str XI), small, unfortified, village in Area B of the upper city (ie, the tell, itself) at Hazor revealed a small rectangular cultic room (the most conspicuous structure in the area; ca 5 x 4m) with a bench lining three walls on its south side (Yadin 1975:255). This cultic room, which was found to one side of the residential buildings, is unconnected to any specific structure. Paved areas were found to the west, south and east of the structure: the area to the west had four stone pillars, while that in the south yielded two broken cult stands, similar to those found at Megiddo in the stratum just preceding that of the Davidic era (VIA). The cultic function of the room was decisively established by the contents of a ceramic jar filled with

bronze votive offerings found under the floor in the southwestern corner of the bench-lined room (Yadin 1975:257). The bronze objects, which were apparently hidden when the village was abandoned late in the 11th century BCE, include weapons (a sword, two javelin heads and javelins butts, an arrow head and a lugged axe blade) and a figurine of a seated male (possibly a war deity), with a cone-like helmet. The figurine was apparently originally fixed on a wooden base and had a hole in his left hand, indicating that at one time it may have held a weapon. Yadin (1975:257) sees the cult room as an Israelite chapel or 'high place' of the sort often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, especially during the 'period of the Judges' (eg, Jdg 18).

### 4.7.7 The cult room at 'Ai

Khirbet et-Tell, the site of ancient 'Ai, lies on the south side of the Wadi-el-Jaya which leads east towards Jericho. Joshua 7-8 tells us that the Israelite pioneers moved up the wadi from Jericho and established their first foothold in the hill country of Canaan by conquering 'Ai. The first significant archaeological work at 'Ai was done by Judith Marquet-Krause in 1933-35, during which she discovered a large (27.5 acre), Early Bronze Age, walled city below an almost insignificant Israelite village, only one-tenth that size. The city of 'Ai was violently destroyed around 2400 BCE. The site was then abandoned and left in ruins until about 1220 BCE, by which time the name of the great Early Bronze Age city had been lost and it was known only as ''*ai*' or 'ruin.' Despite the report of the Israelite conquest of 'Ai in the Book of Joshua, there are no traces of a Late Bronze Age settlement. The most recent excavator, Joseph Callaway (1976:18-19,29) has dated the Iron Age village, which existed only during Iron I, to 1220-1050 BCE. Of interest here, is a partially-excavated room in the northeast part of the Iron I village which Marquet-Krause uncovered and which was later identified by Ziony Zevit (2001:153-6) as a cult room based on its contents and, to a lesser degree, on its design in relation to the adjacent structures (cf Micah's private household shrine (Jdg 17:1ff), with its silver image, ephod and teraphim (Jdg 17:4-5; see 4.5)). As Albertz (1994:100) has pointed out, Exodus 21:6ff 'presupposes that every Israelite household had images of gods or at least a cultic niche.'

The cult room (ca 8.5 x 3m, when reconstructed) contained two large cult stands, a large

bowl, fragments of a storage jar, a cooking pot, some clay balls, and sherds from cooking and storage vessels. The first stand, which contained a primitively-formed animal figurine (possibly a horse or a dog) and some beads, is uniquely fenestrated with a design near its base of protuberant five-toed feet. The second stand, found nearby, is chalice-shape, while the large bowl (which was possibly intended to be used with the fenestrated stand; Zevit 2001:315) has a design of stubby fingerling protuberances. The self-contained room containing these artifacts is the only structure excavated in areas D and Z within the village with raised benches, about 30cm above the floor: one along the western wall and the other along the southern wall. In his reconstruction of the area of the western bench, Zevit (2001:153-154) replaces the fenestrated stand with its contents on the bench where it was originally found, and the large chalice-shaped stand and bowl on the floor before it, with the other store jars and cooking pots. He also proposes that a partially-excavated channel (10cm deep), may have been a run off for liquids used in the ceremonies conducted in the room, since it appears to have drained the floor area in front of the western bench towards the northern downslope of the site. With respect to the design of the room, none of the adjacent domestic dwellings had such a channel (Zevit 2001:154,156). In addition, this room contained no plastered cistern, a feature common to these dwellings. Its unique design suggests that it was designed for a special purpose (ie, as a cult room) during the initial planning of the Iron I village.

### 4.7.8 Cult Room 49 and the 'high place' (Locus 81) at Lachish

After the destruction of the Late Bronze Age Canaanite city at Lachish (Stratum VI; ca 1200 BCE), the mound lay deserted throughout the 12$^{th}$ century and much of the 11$^{th}$ century. In the first Israelite settlement (Stratum V), which cannot antedate the second half of the 11$^{th}$ century since Philistine pottery is completely absent, Yohanan Aharoni (1975a:26-32) discovered a room which, in his opinion, served as an Israelite domestic or private cult installation (Cult Room 49; 10$^{th}$ century), in which food or drink offerings were presented, and an adjacent high place. The sanctuary was partly covered by the large terrace wall of Stratum IV and well-preserved by the deep debris above it. It is a small, rectangular, bench-lined, 'broad' room (2.3 x 3.3m) with an entrance apparently near the centre of the northeastern wall. The benches

(ca 50cm in width) were built of stone and plaster and, although most of the bench area was slightly above floor level, in the western corner it reached a height of about 40cm. Presumably, this corner constituted a kind of raised platform or *bamah*. A small, well-dressed, but broken, basalt slab (possibly a *massebah*) was found lying on what was probably the doorsill. The ritual function of the room is attested by a rich group of cult vessels, some of which were found in a heap between the *bamah* and the entrance, while others were still on the benches, both to the left and the right of the *bamah*, as well as on the *bamah* itself. The more or less complete vessels comprise a limestone altar (ca 45cm high, probably originally four-horned, although only one horn has been preserved; unlike similar altars from Megiddo, its sides are not decorated), four clay stands (two of which are fenestrated; incense burners?), seven chalices, three lamps, two juglets, five jugs, one small cooking-pot, and about seven bowls, two of which had blackened interiors and had been used with the stands. It is possible that some, if not all, of the objects originally stood on the benches on both sides of the *bamah*; the sequence of their use during the performance of rituals, however, remains unclear. Since the cult vessel assemblage resembles that from Building 2081 at Megiddo, Stratum VA (dated to about half a century earlier than Lachish V), the possibility exists that the same type of rituals were carried out in both installations (Aharoni 1975a:26).

The sanctuary also yielded 74 bone fragments: 52 from caprovines (goats and sheep), 21 from cattle, and one from a goose. No pig bones were found in this or later strata of the Iron Age or in those of the Persian and Hellenistic periods; however, fragments of pig bones, as well as those from caprovines and bovines, were recovered from Locus 85 of the Late Bronze Age Stratum VI (Lernau 1975:89-90).

The high place (Locus 81) is a raised platform, supported by terrace walls (Aharoni 1975a:28-30). Near it stood a large, upright *massebah* (1.2m high, 95cm broad and 60cm thick), dressed in plano-convex shape, and held in place by three smaller stones set against its base. The *massebah* apparently remained standing throughout Strata IV and III. A rounded heap of black ashes (ca 50cm in diameter and several centimetres deep; burned during the destruction of Str. V) found directly in front of the *massebah* is, most likely, the remnants of an olive tree and it seems probable that it was an *'asherah*. Two pits were found in the vicinity of the high place (Aharoni 1975a:31). From their contents, they were apparently *favissae*. The first, which was filled with stones, contained a rounded stone with a flat surface and seven shallow cup marks

(used for libation offerings) and at least four *massebot* (each about 60-70cm high), roughly dressed in a square shape (only one was complete; although the rest were broken, they were easily reassembled). Aharoni (1975a:31) feels that they were deliberately defaced and broken and then carefully buried after the violent destruction of Stratum V during the second half of the 10th century (possibly by Shishak), the ritual burial of sanctified objects being an old, wide-spread custom. The second pit contained a red-burnished jug, the head of an 'Asherah' figurine, two fragments of animal figurines, five soft limestone game-pieces of varied shapes, and a carnelian bead. The high place, which was later surrounded by a broad street, apparently continued to exist after the destruction of the sanctuary and, in keeping with the traditions of a sacred area, the Hellenistic temple (Temple 106; the so-called 'Solar Shrine'; Str IA) was eventually constructed above it (Aharoni 1975a:31-32).

### 4.7.9 A brief excursion into Jordan: the cult corner at Tell el-'Umeiri

Cult rooms/corners were not unique to the area west of the Jordan River in Iron I. It is worth noting that a cult corner has recently been discovered in a well-preserved early Iron I house (Building A, comprising 4 rooms, in a line, and an alcove; external dimensions ca 8.5 x 17m; Field B) at Tell el-'Umeiri in Jordan (Herr 2006:61-73). The pottery assemblages recovered from the floors of the four rooms (dated to the very end of the 13th and the first half of the 12th century BCE), as well as the architectural features of the house (the usual houses are divided into three or four rooms), reveal that it had a largely domestic function; however, there are religious overtones which Herr (2006:72) suggests were 'perhaps ceremonial in nature,' although whether or not these were communal activities remains unclear.

The most remarkable feature discovered in Room A2 was a rectangular standing stone (ca 1m high) of hard limestone coated with a veneer of calcrete, which leant against the western wall (Herr 2006:62). Although many stones at 'Umeiri have a veneer of calcrete, this is the only one discovered which is covered on all sides and, according to Herr (2006:63), it is quite clear that it 'was chosen for its natural form and apparently placed in a position of veneration.' Lying in front of it and at $90^0$ to it was a similar, but more oval, stone which, presumably, served as a presentation altar; immediately to the south was a pile of carbonised barley. Seven similar stones, but smaller and more amorphously shaped, lay on the floor of the adjacent

small alcove (Room A4), while another one leant against the southern wall. It is unclear whether these were standing stones, which were stored in the alcove, or whether they served simply as paving stones. The western room (Room A3) which, like Room A2, appears to have once had a second story (the destruction layers in these rooms are ca 1.3 to 1.5m deep), has a plastered platform with three narrow steps on its north side. There are, however, no signs of burning on its hard plastered upper surface; in any event, being an inner room, smoke would not have exited easily. Building A (like the adjacent Building B, with which it shares a common wall) was violently destroyed; several stones comprising the walls were burned to lime and most were charred and cracked by fire (Herr 2006:63-64).

The entire pottery assemblage is mainly domestic in function (eg, cooking pots and *pithoi*; the latter display a wide variety of rim and collar forms, suggesting the presence of a number of potters at the site; they are too heavy (ca 40-50kg when empty) to have been traded goods or used to transport traded items). There are, however, a few items which may have been used in ceremonial or other specialised activities. Room A3 contained chalices, a flask with a high neck and a pie-shaped decoration and a basket-handled jug (an unusual element) with a wide sieved spout, while Room A2 contained two two-handled amphorae and an oil-separation krater with an unusual rim and a spout near the top and a drain hole near the bottom (Herr 2006:66-68).

### 4.7.10 The Arad temple

Although much archaeological work has been undertaken in Jerusalem, to date no trace of Solomon's Temple has been found. This is not surprising, since the First Temple was destroyed initially by the Babylonians in 587-86 BCE and then by the Roman engineers, who cleared the area down to bedrock during the construction of the Second Temple in Herodian times. In addition, as Dever (1990:139) has pointed out, scientific investigation of the site of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosques is not possible: they not only comprise the third holiest shrine of Islam, but the area is also proscribed for Orthodox Jews until the coming of the Messiah. However, archaeological discoveries at other sites have illustrated many of the details of the architectural plan and furnishings of the Solomonic Temple as described in 1 Kings 6-7, as well as in Ezekiel's dream of the restored Temple (Ezk 40-43).

One such discovery is the temple - possibly an Israelite temple and, if so, the first and only such temple - found in the fortress at Arad. Arad is rarely mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, one of the few references being 'the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad' (Jdg 1:16). Tel Arad comprises virtually two settlements. The first began in the Late Chalcolithic period and was completely destroyed before the termination of Early Bronze II. After being deserted for more that 1500 years, the second chapter of settlement began with an early Israelite settlement (12th - 11th century), founded on the southeastern ridge of the ancient city. There was no occupation during the Canaanite period proper (Aharoni 1968:4) which raises the question of who, in fact, was 'the king of Arad' (Nm 21:1)? Almost the entire area of the fortress at Arad was uncovered by Yohanan Aharoni during five seasons (1962-67) of excavations (Aharoni 1968:2-32; Herzog *et al* 1984:1-12,31-32), yielding 12 firmly established occupational strata (including six royal fortresses), beginning with Stratum XII and culminating in an Early Arab caravanserai (Str II). The final stratum is a Bedouin cemetery (Str I), which continued to be used throughout the remainder of the Arab period (Aharoni 1968:3-4).

Stratum XII (12th - 11th centuries BCE) was a small open village, in the centre of which was a paved courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard stood a semicircular platform, originally about 6m in diameter, filled with bricks (Aharoni 1968:19; Herzog *et al* 1984:3). It was partially destroyed by the Hellenistic tower which extended down to bedrock. Standing on a stone pavement which extended to its north, was a raised rectangular stone platform which presumably served as an altar. A fragment of a well-smoothed basalt slab (perhaps a *massebah*) and many pits with burnt bones, including the burnt skeleton of a headless young lamb, were found near the altar. The whole paved area, extending about 30m in each direction, may have been surrounded by a *temenos* wall about 1m thick. Aharoni (1968:4) has suggested that this village may have been the settlement of the descendants of (LXX - Hobab) the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law in 'the Negeb of Arad' (Jdg 1:16) and the platform and altar base 'may reflect in some way the priestly background of this ancient clan' (Herzog *et al* 1984:6).

The fortifications of the first fortress at Arad (Str XI; 10th century; ca 50 x 50 m) were designed according to the casemate pattern and within the fortress the main structures were the temple in the northwestern corner, near the site of the cultic centre of the previous

settlement, and portions of buildings to its east and south (Aharoni 1968:19; Herzog 1984:6-7). The temple (ca 20 x 15m) is bipartite: the inner broad room (9 x 2.7m), with plaster-covered benches for offerings around the walls, served as the *hekal* ('Holy Place'), while a niche (1.2 x 1.2m) reached by three steps served as the *debir* ('Holy of Holies'). At the entrance of the *debir* stood two small limestone altars with traces of an organic incense-like substance and behind them was a small platform with a smoothed stela or monolith. A square courtyard (ca 10 x 10m), paved with wadi stones, stood in front of the temple and in the middle of the courtyard a few foundation stones of the sacrificial altar were found; the altar of Strata X - VIII was built directly over it. The same general plan was maintained throughout the temple's existence. As mentioned above, bipartite temples are part of the local Canaanite traditions going back to the early to mid-second millennium BCE (Dever 1987:231).

When compared to the Solomonic Temple, the Arad temple shows a fundamental difference in architectural concept, especially with regard to the main hall or *hekal*. At Arad the *hekal* was a broad room, while that of the Solomonic temple was a megaron-type long room (Herzog *et al* 1984:7-8). The *debir* also differed from that of the Solomonic Temple by being much more accessible to the worshippers, in keeping with its function as a popular shrine. The long room temple plan would have kept the worshippers at a distance from the symbols of the divine presence, in keeping with its function as a royal temple.

According to Herzog *et al* (1984:8), the temple was undoubtedly 'Israelite': it was an integral part of the royal fortress, built and rebuilt together with it from the first fortress in the days of Solomon. Additional support for its 'Israelite' character comes from the priestly names on the inscriptions found in or around the temple precinct, for example, Pashhur and Meremoth (from Str VIII; cf Ezr 2:38, 8:33; Neh 12:3; Jr 20:1-6). It should also be noted that the central axis of the Arad temple is oriented east-west, with the entrance on the eastern side and the *debir* towards the west, ensuring the ritual progression from east to west around the sacred room. All the biblical shrines with detailed descriptions in the Hebrew Bible have these as standard features, confirming the fact that the Arad temple is a 'temple' and not just a 'high place.' A westward orientation is very rare in the Near East, the only other good example being the temple at Tell Tainat in northern Syria (Aharoni 1968:21).

The fortress of Greater Arad (*hqr 'rd rbt*) is mentioned by Pharaoh Shishak as one of the places he captured in the fifth year of Rehoboam, son of Solomon (Aharoni 1968:9). The

floor of the gateway of Stratum XI is covered by a thick burnt layer providing evidence of its violent destruction, probably by Shishak (ca 925 BCE). Aharoni (1968:31-32) has suggested that Canaanite Arad should be identified with Tell el-Milh, situated about 11km southwest of Tel Arad, where trial excavations have revealed a magnificent Middle Bronze Age fortification; the Shishak list does, after all, mention two fortresses called Arad: 'Arad Rabbat' and 'Arad the House of *yrhm*' (possibly the biblical Jerahmeel). The temple remained in use, with only relatively minor alterations (which, according to Aharoni (1968:24), probably had to do with a change in the standard cubit at the end of the 10th or at the beginning of the 9th century from the smaller cubit to the Egyptian royal cubit (see 2 Chr 3:3)), until Stratum VIII, when it was abolished, possibly as part of the reforms of King Hezekiah in his attempt to re-establish centralised worship in Jerusalem. Reconstruction of the plan of the citadel was assisted by a stone seal found in Stratum IX; the seal's impression appears to be an 'aerial view' of the general layout of the fortress (Aharoni 1968:9, fig 6). It shows the wall, the narrow corridor between the temple to the left and the storehouse to the right, and the rectangular court, behind which is depicted the dwellings and workshops area. Interestingly, the temple is shown as having a rounded roof. Aharoni (1968:8) questions whether the roof was really rounded or whether this is 'only an artistic expression of its outstanding importance?' Only a few cult objects have come to light, presumably because the temple was thoroughly rifled after each destruction. These include a broken, clay 'incense' burner (Str X), a small bronze figurine of a crouching lion (Str IX) and several pottery bowls (Str X), all of which were found in the vicinity of the altar. Also found at the foot of the altar (Str X) were two shallow, burnished offering plates inscribed with the letters *qof* and an archaic *kaf*, probably an abbreviation for *qodes kohanim*, 'set apart for the priests' (Aharoni 1968:19-20).

The continuum of six fortresses (spanning ca 350 years) has produced a rich hoard of epigraphic finds. Some ostraca contain personal names and the *-yahu* theophoric element appears in 30 of the 85 inscriptions (Herzog *et al* 1984:30-31). Of interest here, and in contrast to the Samaria ostraca, no names contain either the element *ba'al* or the theophoric *-yau*. Some of the ostraca are letters which use the more or less identical stereotyped opening formula: 'Your son X sends for the welfare of Y and for the welfare of your house, the blessing of all ... and now ....' The use of this apparently ancient opening formula is well-

known from letters of the Canaanite period, such as the el-Amarna letters and the Ta'anach tablets (Aharoni 1968:11-13).

It should be noted that the date of construction for the Stratum XI temple is surrounded by controversy, with some newer analyses suggesting that the temple was only constructed in the early 7th century and was destroyed a century later (Nakhai 1994:27). In addition, the efficacy of Hezekiah's reform, at least at Arad, has also been called into question. The two inscribed offering plates described above (dated by Aharoni to the 9th century) have been redated to about 650 BCE by Cross (1979:75-78), implying that offerings were made in the temple in the post-Hezekian period. In other words, at Arad, it would seem that Hezekiah's reform (and, for that matter, that of Josiah) did not have a substantial impact. Nevertheless, the Arad temple is worth including as it is generally accepted as being the only Israelite temple ever discovered and its basic plan harks back to the local Canaanite prototypes which predated it.

## 4.8 BURIAL CUSTOMS

Death cult rituals are defined by Lewis (1986:xi) 'as those acts directed toward the deceased functioning either to placate the dead or to secure favours from them for the present life.'

Despite the fact that normative Yahwism was resolute in its condemnation of death cult rituals, Lewis has made a strong circumstantial case for their existence in popular religion. He sees (1986:273-277) vestiges of death cult practices in the Deuteronomistic narrative material, such as 'Saul's encounter with the medium at Endor' (1 Sm 28:3-25) and, most probably, in 'Absalom's Monument' (2 Sm 18:18), 'Jezebel's Burial' (2 Ki 9:34-37) and 'Elisha's Bones' (2 Ki 20-21) - a conclusion which is supported by the death cult imagery in the Prophetic material (eg, Is 8:19, which mocks the practice of necromancy, by comparing it to 'chirping and muttering'; Is 57:6, which describes libations and offerings given to the dead; Is 65:4, which refers to people keeping all-night vigils in tombs, presumably in order to receive an oracle from the dead). The Prophetic condemnations of, or references to, practices which were considered to be abominable, would seem to suggest that they were still being practised in Iron II, or even later. According to Lewis (1986:281), it is not surprising that cults of the dead such as those found in Ugaritic and Mesopotamian literature were practised in ancient Israel -

after all, Israel 'shared a solidarity with the other cultures of the ancient Near East.'

In Hebrew funeral ideology, death was considered to have occurred when the vital force of divine origin (*rwh*), had left the body (Xella 1995:2067). The death of a elderly person, who had lived a full life and had been blessed with descendants, was not considered a tragedy; a premature death, on the other hand, was considered to be the result of divine punishment (cf 1 Sm 25:38ff). The existence of the dead in the afterlife (Sheol) depended solely on the fate of the corpse and it was, thus, important that the body was given a proper burial and that the bones were preserved. Cremation was therefore not practised. The Hebrew Bible gives a detailed description of only one funeral (that of Abner (2 Sm 3:31-36)). Xella (1995:2068), nevertheless, considers it to be 'a sufficiently faithful example of Hebrew funeral customs.'

The Israelite abhorrence of improper burial is clear from several biblical texts. For example, Jehoiakim, the much-hated king of Judah, was denied a proper burial ('his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night' (Jr 36:30); see also Jr 22:19). A similar fate awaited 'any one belonging to Ahab,' including Jezebel, who were all condemned to be eaten by dogs, since 'there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited' (1 Ki 21:23-25). To prevent a corpse (even that of one who had been hanged; Dt 21:23) from becoming carrion, it was interred on the day of death. The fact that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph were embalmed - an exceptional occurrence, although common in Egypt - was, presumably, done to enable the bodies to be repatriated to Canaan for burial (King & Stager 2001:363-364).

Family members were generally interred in a family tomb (King & Stager 2001:365). Gideon (Jdg 8:32) and Samson (Jdg 16:31), for example, are said to have been interred in their fathers' tombs in the vicinity of their hometowns (in Joash's tomb 'at Ophrah of the Abiezrites,' in the case of the former, and 'between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father,' in the latter). A continuous relationship existed between the living and the deceased and several biblical texts clearly illustrate this relationship, as well as the connection between burial and ownership of land. The Fifth Commandment (Ex 20:12) bears witness to the fact that land possession was dependent upon the correct behaviour towards one's ancestors (ie, 'Honour your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you'). Sarah, Jacob and Joseph were all buried in the cave of Machpelah which had been bought by Abraham from Ephron, the Hittite (Gn 23:1-20),

initially as a burial site for Sarah and, where later, he himself was buried. At the request of Jacob, Joseph brought his father's bones from Egypt for burial in the cave of Machpelah (Gn 50:4-14). Joshua (Jos 24:30) is said to have been buried 'in his own inheritance' (ie, patrimony) at Timnathserah. Family burial, according to King and Stager (2001:365) 'secured title to the patrimony (*nahala*), in as much as the inheritance was held to pass through the ancestral dead.'

Mourning customs were similar to those of the people of Ugarit, as well as those of the later Phoenicians, despite being condemned by the 'official' religious ideology. The mourning period was generally for seven days and the manifestations of sorrow included the tearing of clothes, dressing in sackcloth, self-inflicted wounds, the shaving of some or all of one's hair, the sprinkling of ashes or dust, ritual weeping, rolling on the ground and fasting (2 Sm 3:31-36; Xella 1995:2068). According to the Hebrew Bible, after death one was abandoned by Yahweh and consigned to a bleak existence in the afterlife (Sheol). In popular religion, however, the dead (Hebrew: *rephaim*; cf Rapiuma, at Ugarit and Rephaim in Phoenicia; Xella 1995:2066), 'rather than being impotent spirits, are self-possessed numinous beings, endowed with beneficent powers and superior knowledge, who have the ability to communicate with the living' (Xella 1995:2069). Although condemned by 'official' religion, necromancy was probably widely practised (cf Samuel's consultation with the medium at Endor; 1 Sm 28). The living had a 'continuous and symbiotic relationship' with the dead who, in exchange for appropriate care and remembrance, were asked in turn for favours such as protection, fertility and oracular responses.

Rituals were performed by the living for the benefit of the dead (the 'cult of the dead'). 'Official Yahwism' condemned any form of contact with the dead; 'popular religion,' on the other hand, condoned ancestor worship, presumably under the influence of Canaanite practice (King & Stager 2001:376). Placating the dead, or seeking favours from them, was achieved by providing the deceased with personal objects thought to be useful to them in the afterlife. 'The fact that the Hebrew Bible legislates against such a cult argues for its continuous practice' (Lv 19:31; Dt 18:10-11; 26:13-14). In Canaanite tradition, Ba'al was said to have died, descended into the afterlife and had then been resurrected, providing 'an unconscious example of compassion towards human beings, one who mercifully shared their lot' - a tradition which, no doubt, influenced early Israelite belief of a return to life after death (Xella 1995:2069).

## 4.9 TOMB TYPES

While literary data tell us about the rites practised by the living, archaeological data are primarily concerned with the disposal of the dead. However, burials are able to illuminate more than just mortuary rites; they are also 'a key source for the reconstruction of life and customs' (Cooley 1983:47), since they remain practically untouched other than during the addition of subsequent corpses. Despite the fact that the central hill country of Palestine was only sparsely populated during the Late Bronze Age, there are a relatively large number of known burials. Burials were also common in the lowlands during Iron I. The number of known Iron I burials in the hill country is, however, very small (Faust 2004:175). As has been pointed out, it is unlikely that the dead were left unattended or exposed - an alien practice in the ancient Near East, in general, and to ancient Israel, in particular (King & Stager 2001:364). Presumably, either the burial caves of the previous eras were used, in such a manner that only scanty evidence remains, or the dead were buried in simple pit-graves (cf Iron II, where this method was used for the majority of the population). In the case of simple pit-graves, these would only be discovered accidentally, provided they had not been disturbed by agricultural activities (Faust 2004:175-176). In Faust's opinion (2004:183-184), this may have 'resulted from an ideology of simplicity and egalitarianism' and was probably a response 'to those societies in which burials held social significance, when they chose to shun such burials.' In addition, such an ideology would also explain many of the other facets of the Iron I (as well as Iron II) material culture, such as the lack of decorated pottery, the extremely limited ceramic repertoire and the absence of imported pottery (2004:180-181). As he has pointed out (2004:183), people tend to 'define themselves in contrast to "others," and embracing such an egalitarian ideology when interacting with stratified societies is therefore an extremely viable option.'

Although the number of known Iron I burials in the central hill country is very small, those that have been excavated have confirmed that some Israelites were buried either in family caves or bench tombs and that burials were either primary or secondary (King & Stager 2001:364). The benches were carved or built of boulders along three side walls. In primary burials, the remains were left untouched after decomposition and the tomb or grave often

housed only one corpse. In secondary burials, the body was housed temporarily at the burial site and, after decomposition, the remains were transferred to a special repository/pit cut into the floor of the tomb (ie, the deceased were 'gathered to their fathers' (eg, Jdg 2:10; 2 Ki 22:20) or 'buried with his fathers' (eg, 2 Ki 8:24) or 'slept with his fathers' (eg, 2 Ki 13:13)). The family tomb was either a natural cave or a limestone rock-cut type, which was accessed by means of a short, sloping tunnel. Rock-cut tombs often consisted of several chambers, each surrounded by rock benches, upon which the deceased were placed. These tombs could contain either primary or secondary burials (King & Stager 2001:364-366). In the case of secondary burials, the decomposed remains were heaped up on the floor or transferred to a pit, in order to accommodate a subsequent burial. During the Iron Age, neither sarcophagi nor ossuaries (common to the Hellenistic and Roman periods) were used by the Israelites. The earliest bench tombs (13$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ centuries BCE) are found at Tell el-Far'ah (S) and were used to bury Egyptians (not 'Philistines' as commonly thought, due to the presence of anthropoid sarcophagi); this type of tomb, however, only became popular in Israel and, especially, Judah from the 10$^{th}$ to the 7$^{th}$ centuries BCE (King & Stager 2001:367).

### 4.9.1 The Tomb of Dothan

The remains of at least 288 individuals (more interments than in *any* other LBA - Iron I tomb excavated to date) were found in Chamber Tomb 1, a rock-cut 'family' tomb, at Dothan (Gn 37:17; 2 Ki 6:13) in the Manassite territory north of Shechem (Cooley 1983:50-52; King & Stager 2001:367-368). The central chamber is well-cut and irregularly shaped (5.0 x 8.3m), with a domed roof; it contained 6 niches (ca 1m above the chamber floor) for burials and was accessed by a vertical shaft leading to a seven-stepped entryway. The doorway was closed by a slab of hard stone. In contrast to the tombs at Ugarit, the Dothan tomb was not attached to a residence, but was part of a necropolis, on the western slopes of the tell *outside* the settlement area; the family members were, nevertheless, together in a 'city of the dead,' which Cooley (1983:54) sees 'as a symbolic replica of the living community.' Since the family group remained intact after death, in the company of their everyday goods, the necropolis 'is a material artifact reflecting the community life of the settlement.' The vessels, furniture, implements and personal accessories were the same as those used by the living (Cooley

1983:55).

This tomb is one of the most important excavated tombs for burial reconstruction, especially since it was used continuously during Late Bronze II and Iron I, for multiple burials. The excavator, Joseph P Free (1953-64; cited by Cooley 1983:50) was able to distinguish 5 burial strata (ca 14th to end of 12th century BCE), suggesting 'that this multi-generational family bridged the transition from "Canaanite" to "Israelite" at Dothan' (King & Stager 2001:367). It would appear, too, that presumably, while forging a new identity, they had retained many of their earlier customs. No coffins had been used and the corpses had simply been placed either on the floor or the debris of earlier burials. Cooley (1983:53) has pointed out that, although a great deal of care was exercised in the placement of the corpse and the arrangement of the tomb equipment, as soon as the flesh had decomposed, the body was treated with little respect and the bones and equipment could simply be swept aside. To him, this would indicate that, as long as the flesh existed, the deceased was 'conscious of feeling and actually lived in the tomb requiring food and drink and personal supplies.' Once the flesh had decomposed, the deceased had reached the afterlife and no longer required the mortuary equipment, which could now be removed or destroyed, without fear of retaliation. The tomb was nothing more than a temporary place, on the journey to the afterlife (ie, it was not viewed as a permanent residence). 'This evidence indicates a belief in an afterlife, but cultic practices were not a part of the activity for the dead' (Cooley 1983:54).

In addition to the remains, some 3000 artifacts for catering to the needs of the deceased in the afterlife were discovered. These included a thousand complete pots, bowls, pyxides, pottery vessels, lamps, clothing, jewellery, a bronze dagger and other household goods. The bronze dagger had been intentionally bent and placed in a bowl with a food offering. Cooley (1983:56) has suggested that 'this practice set free the object's soul to accompany the spirit of its dead owner.' Other finds included five realistic zoomorphic vessels representing bulls (probably associated with the local fertility cult) and finger rings; there were no figurines nor amulets, other than scarabs. Objects connected to ritual and religion are rare, with one exception: a *kernos* ring, which had probably been used for libations. According to Cooley (1983:52), since all the objects were either domestic or utilitarian, there is 'no evidence of concern for the spiritual needs of dead in the afterlife.'

Two large storage jugs, each with a dipper juglet, were located outside the chamber below an

opening/window above one of the chamber niches, leading Cooley (1983:51) to suggest that water had been poured through the opening to appease the thirst of the deceased. According to King and Stager (2001:367), however, 'it is just as likely that these jars held wine.' The tombs at Dothan (including Chamber Tomb I) also contained animal bones, six of which (from Iron I) were positively identified as belonging to goats and five, as those of sheep. Presumably, they had been placed intentionally as food offerings, a practice which 'appears to have been continuous from Middle Bronze to at least Iron I.' While there is some doubt as to which items belonged to Late Bronze II and which to Iron I, this would be of secondary importance since the tomb was in continuous use throughout this period. In addition, as King and Stager (2001:368) have observed: 'no one is suggesting that "Canaanites" occupied it in the Late Bronze and "Israelites" in Iron I [if they are not one and the same here].' The continuous usage, without any apparent change in burial customs and practices, however, tends to support the proposal that the inhabitants of the highlands of Palestine during Iron Age I were, in fact, indigenous Canaanites.

Since all the tombs in the area reflect similar burial customs and appear to be representative of the upper levels of society, it is not clear whether this was the result of the existence of a uniform burial practice, irrespective of social class, or whether all the residents of the settlement had a similar social standing (Cooley 1983:55).

## 4.10 CONCLUSION

While the assemblages of cultic artifacts differ in detail, in content they still resemble, and may have been borrowed from, those of Late Bronze Age Canaan, with one exception. Although altars are well known from Canaanite culture, small four-horned altars appear to be a 10$^{th}$ century BCE innovation. That the Canaanite emphasis on animal sacrifice appears to have persisted is unsurprising, since animal sacrifice was, in fact, central to all religions of the biblical world. Altars have been discovered, not only in Palestine, but in Mesopotamia (at sites such as Eridu, Ur, Khafajah and Assur), Syria, Egypt, Anatolia, Greece, Cyprus, and the Aegean Islands (Mitchell 1982:26-27). Unfortunately, the deity/deities worshipped remains unclear, as does the significance of the recurring pattern of a fenestrated with a plain cult stand (eg, in the cult rooms at 'Ai and Megiddo; at Lachish two fenestrated stands were paired

with plain stands). The two altars of differing sizes (one larger than the other) found in close proximity at both Dan and Arad may indicate, as noted above, that each was intended for a different deity, one more important than the other.

Some of the cultic practices depicted in the Hebrew Bible, such as the building of an altar (eg, Gn 12:7), the erecting of a *massebah* and anointing it with oil (eg, Gn 28:18), or the offering of sacrifice by non-priests (eg, Jdg 6:19-21) are comparable to what is known about Canaanite culture and are best explained, according to Dearman (1992:15), 'as illustrations of widely employed practices, particularly of personal and clan piety' - practices which pre-dated the Israelites and which would persist long after the formation of the Monarchy. Orthodox Israelite ideology represented dynastic and state concerns; these cultic practices, on the other hand, 'were more oriented to the family life cycle and clan/village ethos' and cultic sites would have been able to 'preserve distinctive customs more conservatively than larger temples.'

The persistence of the Canaanite religion - especially that of the fertility cult with a 'Mother/fertility goddess' - is unsurprising. The inhabitants of Palestine were a marginal-zone society, with an agriculturally-based economy. What is surprising, however, is the decline in the number and types of divine images, coupled with the lack of temples in the early Iron Age (when compared to the number of anthropomorphic (both male and female) and zoomorphic figurines, as well as the number of temples in the Late Bronze Age). This is, according to Dearman (1992:38), best explained 'as a reflection of a dominant strain in early Yahwism .... Both elements presuppose that the Canaanite ethos of early Israelite religion did not require [or want] the tangible representations of cultic practice that were so capable of manipulation and abuse.' In addition, many of the settlers would have rejected these temples and images, since they had been part of 'the oppressive practices of the former city-states.' In my opinion, however, as the period of aridity progressed (ca 1200 - 900 BCE), the settlers probably felt

an increasing need to enlist the aid of the fertility goddess.[25] Chapter 5 will provide evidence that, after a period of comparatively cool weather (ca 1500-1200 BCE), from about 1200 to 900 BCE Palestine was notably warmer and the Dead Sea experienced a dramatic drop in level from about 1200 to at least 700 BCE. The frequency of terra-cotta female 'pillar' figurines in the material culture of the late 8th and 7th century BCE Judah, 'reflects a society deeply concerned about human fertility and the fruitfulness of the land, if not deeply interested in the feminine aspects of the divine world;' Dearman 1992:89). Although these female figurines post-date the pre-monarchic period, if they are indeed fertility figurines it would appear that the veneration of the old Canaanite Mother Goddess continued throughout the Iron Age. And, as for the paucity of early Iron Age figurines and the lack of temples, perhaps the settlers in the hill country were simply too preoccupied with the settlement process to have actually had the time to make them. There was also little opportunity for them to obtain figurines from elsewhere, due to their isolation from the regional trade routes.

Regarding the cultic sites themselves, archaeological evidence from the so-called period of the Judges ranges from open-air sanctuaries (the 'Bull Site,' Mt. Ebal, and, possibly, Arad Stratum XII), to a pilgrimage site (Shiloh), to what appears to be an early Israelite alteration and reuse of a Late Bronze Canaanite temple (the Tower (*migdal*) Temple at Shechem), and to small village sanctuaries (the cult rooms at 'Ai and Hazor). This somewhat meagre, eclectic group of sites represents the type of diversity one would expect from an amalgam of disparate tribal groups involved in a slow and uneven settlement and unification process. The small open-air sanctuaries and cult rooms appear to reflect the religious needs of a simple, agrarian, non-urban society that required no elaborate religious rituals and, presumably, religion was practised differently at home, village, sanctuary and extra-urban sanctuary. It is also worth

25 Fertility goddesses are not unique to the ancient Near East. Even as late as the 18th century CE, when most elements of paganism had been eradicated from rural peasant religious practices, Melusine, whose mythology in medieval times is known from a 14th century romance, was the fertility symbol in the folk tales passed by word of mouth, in the mountainous area of southeastern France (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:99,101,212). Melusine, a creature with the body of a woman and the tail of a serpent and who inhabited wells and springs, was the earthmother who guaranteed 'the fruitfulness of the harvest and the prosperity of the *house* [in both senses of the word: lineage and building].' She symbolized 'a cult of the powers of reproduction in which the interests of agriculture and the family, and sexual obsessions relating to the phallic mother, are inextricably mixed;' Le Roy Ladurie 1997:101). By the mid-late 17th century, less emphasis was placed in the oral culture on her maternal aspects and more on her role in agriculture (Le Roy Ladurie 1997:215-216).

noting that cult rooms/corners were not unique to the area west of the Jordan River (cf the cult corner discovered at Tell el-'Umeiri).

Remains of sanctuaries discovered from the time of the United Monarchy (10th century BCE) include Shrine 2081 at Megiddo, the poorly preserved cult structure at Ta'anach, Cult Room 49 and the 'high place' (Locus 81) at Lachish, the Tell el-Far'ah (N) (Tirzah) city gate cult site, Bamah A at Tel Dan, and possibly the Arad Temple (Str XI). Although displaying unique features (often reflecting the requirements of their individual locations), these sites show an increasing degree of uniformity with respect to architecture, cultic objects and choice of locations. Unfortunately, the sites discussed above provide no direct or clear archaeological evidence as to the deity/deities being worshipped. It is worth noting that biblical texts attest to the legitimacy of the monarchical *bamah* 'as a place of service for otherwise disenfranchised priestly groups and to its use by non-Jerusalemites' (Nakhai 1994:27) and reference is made to sanctuaries at, for example, Megiddo, Lachish, and Ta'anach.

Several of the Iron I sites discussed above (eg, the 'Bull Site,' the Tower Temple at Shechem, Cult Room 49 and the 'high place' (Locus 81) at Lachish, and the various shrines associated with Dan's Iron II gate complex) feature stones which have been identified as *massebot*. According to Graesser (1972:34), ancient Palestinians thought of *massebot* as 'standing stones,' as suggested by the etymological origin of the term (from *nsb* 'to set up') and they 'served as a marker, jogging the memory.' Unlike those from Egypt and Mesopotamia, Palestinian *massebot* (as well as many in Syria and Phoenicia) are 'mute,' having neither inscriptions, nor reliefs. Presumably, however, they served some of the same functions as those of inscribed standing stones: *memorial*, to mark the memory of a dead person and often the position of his/her grave; *legal*, to mark a legal relationship between individuals or groups; *commemorative*, to commemorate an event and, more specifically, to honour the participants for their roles in the event being commemorated; and *cultic*, to mark the cultic immanence of the deity so that worship offered there reached him/her. The latter function is perhaps the least common amongst inscribed *massebot*, but is the most important for this discussion. It should also be noted that a single stone may have carried out more than one function, whilst the meaning of a particular stone probably changed from one generation to the next (Graesser 1972:35-37,45).

Biblical texts report *massebot* at relatively few sites in Israel (eg, at Bethel (Gn 28:10-22); at

Gilead (Gn 31:43-54); as a grave marker for Rachel's grave (Gn 35:16-20); at Samaria, where a *massebah* of Ba'al is reported to have stood in the Ba'al temple (2 Ki 3:2; 10:27), and the large stone (although not called a *massebah*) set up by Joshua (Jos 24:26) under 'the oak,' in the sanctuary at Shechem). Usually, at any one place, only a single *massebah* is set up, although twelve are reported to have stood at Sinai (Ex 24:4), 'according to the twelve tribes of Israel.' Unfortunately, biblical texts do not make the role of *massebot* in cultic contexts clear and provide little information about the rituals in which they are involved, while the available evidence from the ancient Near East (eg, classical authors, inscriptions on *massebot*, excavated sites, and other relevant artifacts, such as coins and seals), reveals little more than the fact that 'standing stones were objects of veneration and worship, conventionalized aniconic representations of a deity - aniconic only in the sense that they did not attempt to represent a physical likeness' (Zevit 2001:257).

Although rarely discovered in excavations in Israel, *massebot* were part of the religio-cultural landscape long before its establishment and are well-known from other contiguous and contemporary cultures. Surveys in the Negev and in Sinai since the mid-1970s, for example, have recorded hundreds of sites featuring standing stones, dating from the fifth to the third millennia BCE and usually in groups of two, three, or seven, 'which correspond to the most frequent groupings of deities known from the ancient Near East' (Zevit 2001:256). In addition, the shapes and sizes of the stones in a particular grouping may vary, with tall thin stones frequently being found next to shorter, more squat ones, 'an arrangement duplicating many ancient and archaic statues in which a thin male is next to a shorter but broader female' (Zevit 2001:257). It may be significant that the three earlier Iron II *massebot* shrines associated with Dan's gate complex (ca 9$^{th}$ to 8$^{th}$ century BCE) have sets of five basalt standing stones, perhaps representing a pentad of deities, while the later one (ca 7$^{th}$ century BCE) has a set of three of varying sizes, possibly representing a family: male, female and child.

A number of early Israelite religious practices show cultural continuity with Late Bronze Age Canaan. The production of cultic commodities such as figurines, offering vessels and olive oil in *temenos* areas has a long history in Palestine (Stager & Wolff 1981:97). The forecourt of the Middle Bronze II sanctuary at Nahariyah has, for example, yielded a stone mould for casting metal (probably silver) figurines of a horned goddess, while several composite pottery

vessels, each with seven small cups, were found *in situ* on the open-air altar of Phase A (the earliest level; see 3.4.1.2). This altar was saturated with an oily substance, as was the larger altar above it (Phase B). In addition, seven-spouted lamps fuelled with olive oil were found within the precinct (cf the seven-spouted sanctuary lamps found at Tel Dan). Nearby, was a sunken slab-lined receptacle, with a base area measuring 0.60 x 0.50m, surrounded by paving. This basin is, most probably, an olive crushing vat and it may have been used to produce oil for use in cereal offerings or the lamps. A potter's kiln, with 22 miniature votive bowls in one of the firing chambers (Yadin 1975:115), stood in the courtyard of the Late Bronze I temple to the west of the altar in Area H at Hazor; such vessels were probably sold to worshippers making offerings. In Area C at Hazor, the potter's workshops were located near the 'Stelae Temple' and are thus likely to have been connected with temple activities (Yadin 1975:49-55).

The tradition of producing cultic commodities was apparently carried on at some of Israelite cultic sites discussed above. Olive pressing installations have been found within the cult precincts at Ta'anach and Tel Dan, and possibly at Tell el-Far'ah (N), although the social context of this precinct is far less certain (if removed from its stratigraphic association with the gate; Stager & Wolff 1981:100). As has been pointed out by Stager and Wolff (1981:98), the architectural layout of the sacred precinct at Dan resembles those of the earlier sanctuaries at Hazor and Nahariyah. There is also evidence at Ta'anach for the production of textiles (loom weights and spindle whorls; cf 2 Ki 23:7) and figurines (a clay mould for making terra-cotta figurines of the 'Tambourine Goddess' was discovered in the storeroom (Room 1)).

According to the Hebrew Bible, olive oil has several ritual uses: in anointing ceremonies (at the investiture of priests (eg, Ex 29:4-9; 40:12-15) and during the coronation of the king (eg, 1 Ki 1:39)); as fuel for sanctuary lamps; and as an ingredient of cereal offerings. Biblical tradition attests to the importance of burnt animal (*zebah*) and cereal (*minhah*) offerings (Jdg 13:19; 1 Sm 3:14; 2 Ki 16:12-13). Both types of sacrifices were burnt on altars 'in the high places' or in temple courtyards. The olive oil produced in the Israelite cultic sites was most likely used for lamps and as an ingredient of cereal offerings, because of its combustible qualities (Stager & Wolff 1981:97).

Archaeology has confirmed that what the Hebrew Bible tells us about the importance a proper burial, the use of family tombs, the provision of food offerings, libations and personal objects

to cater to the needs of the deceased in the afterlife, in order to ensure the well-being and prosperity of the living; there is, however, no significant break in funerary ideology during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Ideas about death and funeral rites, in fact, closely approximated those of Canaanite traditions (see 3.3.7; Xella 1995:2067). It is interesting to note, however, that while the family tombs at Ugarit were built below the family house, those at Dothan (although the family group remained intact) were located in a necropolis *outside* the settlement area.

The fact that the assemblages of cultic artifacts, the cultic sites themselves, and the burial customs and practices resemble those of Late Bronze Age Canaan (except where otherwise noted) would seem to support the proposal that the majority of settlers were, in fact, Canaanites. Presumably 'Official Yahwism' developed at a later date. The frequent condemnations of popular Canaanite rites would imply that these traditions were very much part of the lives of the early Israelites. The 9$^{th}$ to 8$^{th}$ century BCE inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Timan, in the eastern Sinai), for example, would seem to indicate that these traditions were able to exist in a peaceful syncretism and that other deities were sometimes worshipped alongside Yahweh (Dever 1984:21-37).

# CHAPTER 5

## CLIMATE VARIABILITY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Thus far, an attempt has been made to determine *who* the settlers in the highlands of Palestine, during Iron Age I, were (ie, where did the majority of the settlers originate?). The question now arises: *why* did they move? In the discussion which follows, it is proposed that the majority of the central hill country settlers came from the lowlands of Palestine and that this substantial movement of people, a movement which would have been associated with a shift from an urban to a rural lifestyle, was due, at least in part, to the fact that Palestine, from the late 13th century to about 900 BCE, became significantly drier.[26] In addition, the benefits of such a move will be spelled out.

Should the central hill country settlers have indeed been drawn from the indigenous population of Canaan - and, in particular, from the lowland city-states - this would explain why the religious practices of the Iron I settlers appear to reflect continuity with, and seem to be practically indistinguishable from, the Late Bronze Age Canaanite cult. It is acknowledged, however, that there are minor differences, such as the lack of temples in the highlands and the appearance in the 10th century BCE of the unique, small four-horned altars. Since the Canaanite religious practices were intrinsically related to nature and fertility, a notably warmer and an increasingly and significantly drier climate would have favoured their retention - the settlers were, after all, a marginal-zone society with an agriculturally-based economy.

26 It has recently come to my attention that this proposal is almost identical to that made by William Stiebing in his book *Out of the desert* (1989). Stiebing has, in fact, gone even further and proposed an overarching 'climatic' model for cultural change throughout the Levant at the end of the Late Bronze Age (1989:167-187;189-197). In Dever's opinion (1991:88, n 7), however, Stiebing's 'model' 'goes beyond the available evidence and is not likely to add anything of substance to the discussion' - I would disagree.

## 5.1 CLIMATE STUDIES: RESEARCH HISTORY

Climatology, a highly technical subject, is concerned not only with the 'weather' (ie, the particular effects of precipitation, temperature, air movement and cloud cover) 'but also with their overall patterns, both spatially and temporally, and their interconnectedness or otherwise - that is, the extent to which they constitute a system' (Harding 1982b:2). Although observations of unusual climatic events are to be found much earlier (eg, in the Egyptian records), Aristotle (ca 4th century BCE, in *Meteorologica* I:xiv; cited by Harding 1982b:1) is considered to be the first climate scientist 'to have gone beyond mere observation to the level of speculation on the causes of the observed meteorological effects' - even if he was spectacularly wrong in most of his conclusions (Harding 1982b:2).

Climate studies as a field of scientific study, with its own interdisciplinary methodology, has, however, only come into its own relatively recently. Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, 'the history of the climate was still a sort of happy hunting ground for hasty historians with a penchant for simplistic theories of causality' (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:290). Rather than referring to 'changes in climate,' a more appropriate expression is 'climate fluctuations.' Fluctuations are generally long and slow, of variable duration and they occur against a background of a climate which is stable in the long term. They are not 'cyclic;' that is, they do not occur regularly every set number of years (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:289). The *aim* of climatic history is neither 'to explain human history, nor to offer simplistic accounts of this or that remarkable episode ... not even when such episodes prompt us, with good reason, to reflect upon the great disasters of history' (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:295). In the initial stages, the aim is simply to obtain as clear a picture as is humanly possible of the changing climatic patterns of the period of interest. However, the 'spin off' most certainly has 'a bearing on the chronology of famines and also, perhaps, of epidemics' - these, however, 'remain marginal.'

The spectacular retreat of the European Alpine glaciers over the last 150 years is one of the best possible introductions to the topic of climatic history, where the principle factor responsible is a rise in temperature. Since 1860, the average annual increases of between a few tenths and one degree centigrade have resulted in the thaw of huge glacier tongues in the mountains of Western Europe (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:288-289). A combination of *glaciology* and *meteorology* has been used to chart these fluctuations. *Glaciological* methods include the

analysis of archival material, *geomorphology* (the study of moraines), *palynology* (the study of pollens in marshes and peat-bogs situated downstream of glaciers) and *nuclear biology* (the Carbon-14 dating of the debris of trees either left behind in moraines, or those uncovered by retreating glaciers; Le Roy Ladurie 1979:295).

In the USA, dendroclimatologists, using very old trees, have succeeded in producing rainfall graphs covering a period exceeding a thousand years. *Dendrochronology* (the study of the growth-rings of trees) is able to produce information relating to earlier periods on droughts in arid and subtropical regions, on rainfall in temperate zones and on cold conditions in northern lands. Growth-rings of sequoias and other conifers, in arid regions, are very thin during drought years; a succession of thick rings, on the other hand, would indicate a series of comparatively wetter years (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:290,294). Other techniques include *phenology* (a branch of biology concerned with the 'appearance' of vegetative phenomena, eg, the ripening of fruits), which has been used to convert wine-harvest dates from archival material from France, Switzerland and the Midi into graphs, thus producing relatively firm conclusions as to the nature of the summer climate over the past five centuries (ie, well before accurate temperature readings commenced). *Palynology* (the science of pollens) has been used in Germany and France to examine sphagnum moss and other moisture-loving plants, trapped in 'recurrence surfaces' between peat layers in peat-bogs, as an indicator of decades of humidity in the Middle Ages (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:291). These methods obviously have little applicability for Palestine during Iron I (ca 1200-1000 BCE). Palynological studies, for example, have offered only minimal help, since very few areas of Palestine are suited to pollen preservation (Hopkins 1987:180). Although dendrochronology has been applied to carefully-dated timber samples from archaeological digs (Le Roy Ladurie 1979:301), the likelihood of the discovery of sufficiently intact timber beams from, for example, the roof supports of four-room houses is extremely low.

Much archival and anecdotal material is available in Europe for the latter half of the second millennium CE. The climate historian exploring the climate history, from the 18$^{th}$ century onwards, for example, is required to simply collate, verify, tabulate and publish the relatively plentiful meteorological observations (temperature, rainfall and barometric pressure; Le Roy Ladurie 1979:293-294). Parish registers, family diaries and private correspondence are also able to yield empirical and qualitative observations concerning climatic conditions. In the

discussion which follows, textual evidence from Southwestern Asia (eg, the Ugaritic, Akkadian and Mesopotamian texts) will be examined for references to drought and famine and compared to the archaeological and paleoclimatic evidence applicable to this arid region.

## 5.2 WEATHER FLUCTUATIONS IN THE LATTER PART OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE AND THE EARLY IRON AGE

Many migrations in the Mediterranean are known to have been caused by drought and hunger: Herodotus (cited by Bouzek 1982:186) reported famine to have been the reason for the migrations of the Lydians and the Etruscans; Greek colonisation during the 8th century BCE has been attributed - at least, in part - to famine in the overpopulated Greek cities at that time; while, even in more modern times such as the 19th century, migrations in Brazil and China have been linked to droughts. If people 'wanted to survive, they had to move elsewhere or to adapt their system to the changing conditions' (Bouzek 1982:186).

Palestine experiences extreme climatic differences, being temperate sub-humid in the north and sub-tropical hyper-arid in the south. The mean average rainfall also differs markedly. Some places in Upper Galilee, for example, experience a mean annual rainfall of as much as 1000mm, while the southern Negev receives only 25mm and rain may be entirely absent for several consecutive years. These differences, as well as drastic fluctuations in the climate, appear to have had a tremendous impact on the ancient Israelites, since rain and drought, as well as heat and cold, play a prominent role in the Hebrew Bible in a variety of texts, including poetry, proverbs, curses and blessings - the most feared evidently being hunger and famine, since these are mentioned most frequently (Zohary 1982:26). Sufficient rainfall or the lack thereof most probably would have meant the difference between life and death, since agricultural yields depended largely on precipitation. In addition, drastic fluctuations in the climate would have had an impact on their religious beliefs and practices.

There is some evidence that the Near East became increasingly and significantly drier in the latter part of the Late Bronze Age and McCarter (1992:130) suspects that this was one of the important factors which contributed to the destabilisation of life in the lowland cities and the change of settlement patterns in Iron Age I, since it is easier for people to live in hill country

villages than in cities when the weather becomes drier. According to Halpern (1983:98), the movement of the settlers 'into a relatively uninhabited area suggests more than anything else a shift in climate and patterns of precipitation;' in addition, the effects of climatic warming on the coastal agriculture 'can only have been devastating' (1983:100). Thompson (1999:155,158-161) is also of the opinion that drought played a significant role in the movement of the population of Palestine into the central hill country, a sentiment echoed by Matthews and Benjamin (1993:2). According to them: 'By 1250 BCE perhaps sixty percent of the people of Syria-Palestine had died from starvation due to crop failures, which followed subtle changes in climate and the exhaustion of natural resources.'

Why, then, would this move have been to their advantage? Firstly the coastal ranges, even in times of drought, have more precipitation than the lowlands, courtesy of the westerly rain-bearing winds from the Mediterranean; in addition, the larger valleys of the central hills were blessed with an abundance of springs (Coote & Whitelam 1987:83; Thompson 1999:161). The central highlands have an asymmetrical topography: the western, windward, relatively moist slope drops gently towards the Mediterranean, while the eastern, leeward, arid slope (being in the rain shadow) drops steeply towards the Jordan Valley. As the moisture-laden air from the Mediterranean is forced to rise by the windward side of the mountain range (which rises to some 900m, about 50km from the sea, after which it levels out to form a plateau), the vapour condenses to form clouds and is then precipitated as rain (the orographic effect). The moisture-deprived air then descends the leeward side, compresses, warms up and desiccates the land. In such a situation, the streams carrying the runoff tend to flow from the plateau down the western slope towards the sea (Hillel 2006:141,143).

Secondly, if forest and woodland were the dominant features, the mountainous areas rather than the lowlands of ancient Western Asia would have provided some of the best grazing land in the area (Rowton 1967:277). Thirdly, the thicker vegetation and the rocky natural defences provided by the terrain, would have made it more difficult for adequate military control of the area by the city-states, giving the settlers more independence and the remote mountainous regions 'would have constituted a refuge for uprooted social elements' (Rowton 1967:263). As Halpern (1983:87) has pointed out, one of the simplest and yet most relevant facts retrieved from the Amarna archives (especially those written by the prolific Rib-Adda of Byblos; see Chaney 1983:72ff), is that the mountainous areas in the interior, even prior to the

settlement period, 'tended to be most restive, or most successful at restiveness,' due to their remoteness[27] 'in terms of time, access and effort, from Egyptian control,' enabling the inhabitants to enjoy 'a greater latitude of policy than did their counterparts on the plains.' Although the Amarna materials give no hint of a movement to the hills at that stage, this area would nevertheless have been 'less subject to the vicissitudes of local and international politics than were the plains' (Halpern 1983:88). Fourthly, being independent of 'large-scale agriculture or vulnerable central food supplies' the settlers 'would have been far more resistant to the harsh conditions of such an era.' Finally, a 'relatively decentralised hills population would have been better suited to survive by alternative means of food production' (Halpern 1983:101) and I feel that the 'roots, shoots and fruits' and the abundance of acorns naturally available in these woodlands, even during periods of drought, were probably important dietary supplements.

### 5.2.1 Paleoclimatic, nontextual and textual evidence for the warming of the Near East (ca 1200-900 BCE)

#### *5.2.1.1 Paleoclimatic evidence*

A general climatic decline is known to have occurred in the northern hemisphere from about 1500 BCE onwards (Bintliff 1982:150). Paleoclimatic studies for the Late Bronze Age in Mesopotamia have been shown to correspond with the well-documented changes in weather patterns in Europe during the period 1200-900 BCE (Neumann & Parpola 1987:162-163). A striking correspondence has also been found between moisture trends in Europe and the Near East in all phases (including today) so far examined. In addition, modern meteorological data show a close correlation between the climate and weather characteristics of the eastern Mediterranean littoral and northern Iraq. It is a fair assumption that the levels of correlation in

27 As Chaney (1983:49) has pointed out: 'Even the language of "official" religion at Ugarit reflected this situation.' The mythic text *CTA* 4.7.35-37 relates that:

> Ba'al's enemies take to the woods,
> Haddu's foes to the sides of the mountain crag.

ancient times did not differ substantially from those in modern times (Neumann & Parpola 1987:170).

Following a few centuries of comparatively cool weather (ca 1500 - 1200 BCE), favourable (on the average) for increased precipitation, historical climatology studies have strongly suggested that from about 1200 until about 900 BCE, Europe and, according to a few but nevertheless convincing textual and nontextual sources, the Near East became notably warmer. Near Eastern winters are the main rainfall season and there is a strong tendency for cool winters to be rainy as well (a fact reflected in a study of Jerusalem's rainfall data since the middle of the 19th century). The resultant reduced amounts of rain which tend to be produced by warmer winters was bound to have a negative effect on the local agriculture. A mere increase of $1^0$C in mean winter temperatures has been estimated to reduce the annual rainfall in the area by as much as 30mm. If one presumes that the favourable climatic conditions prior to 1200 BCE had boosted the population growth in settled areas to ecologically critical limits,[28] then it is clear that even a seemingly small warming after 1200 BCE would have been sufficient to disrupt the economies and stability of the Canaanite city-states. Dry conditions are known to produce years of crop failure, famine, and social and political unrest (Neumann & Parpola 1987:162,169).

*5.2.1.2 Nontextual evidence*

As an example of nontextual evidence for the eastern Mediterranean littoral, Schaeffer (in Neumann & Parpola 1987:163-164) has pointed out in *Ugaritica V* that the soil (up to 2m thick in places) found everywhere in the excavated area of Ugarit and into which the destroyed buildings marking its end (early 12th century BCE) are embedded consists of fine, powdery,

28 According to Finkelstein (1996:208), 'recent studies have shown beyond doubt that the population had never reached close to a "carrying capacity" point, and hence there were no land-hungry demographic surpluses eager to expand into new frontiers.' However, irrespective of the origins of the new settlers, a climatic shift is still of significance since it would have simultaneously affected both the settled regions and the nomadic habitats (Neumann & Parpola 1987:161). Deterioration of the climate would have led to the loss of the nomad's economic base - the pasture grounds would have been lost and, most probably, animals through illness, causing 'a fall out of the nomadic cycle' (Van der Steen 1996:66).

homogeneous particles of a light yellow, often whitish colour. In his view, this 'without any doubt whatsoever indicates a period of extreme heat and dryness at the time of Ugarit's end' (cited by Neumann & Parpola 1987:163). The brown soil from both the layers below (containing the early Late Bronze (15th - 14th centuries) and the late Middle Bronze (late 17th century) ruins) and above (Late Iron Age (probably ca 7th - 6th century)), are non-powdery and of a colour suggesting a more rainy climate. In other words, the dry powdery layer of 'Ugarit final' is sandwiched between two layers indicating a moist climate. Similar indications were also observed by Schaeffer at Enkomi, Cyprus (cited by Neumann & Parpola 1987:163).

Other studies include estimates of the Tigris-Euphrates peak streamflow over the past 6 000 years based on ten regional paleoenvironmental 'proxy' data (ie, indirect, climatic data; eg, pollen from five areas of the Near East, Persian Gulf sediments, barley-harvest dates, etc) and an analysis of anomalies in the radiocarbon record in the Near East (Neumann & Parpola 1987:164). The former study indicates that a sharp increase of peak steamflow began about 1450 BCE, with a maximum peak dating to about 1350 - 1250 BCE, followed by a sharp drop reaching a minimum peak about 1150 BCE and then by a relatively sharp rise about 950 BCE. The latter study tentatively indicates that the years 1420 - 1260 BCE were a time of low solar activity which produced a relatively cold and rainy period.

*5.2.1.3 Textual evidence*

The Ugaritic texts tell us (Leonard 1989:30) that a famine, described as being a 'matter of life and death' in parts of Great Hatti, occurred during the reign of the Hittite king, Shuppiluliumas II, causing him to request his vassal in Ugarit to send a shipment of 2000 measures of grain to Cilicia. This protracted drought is, in fact, one of the two main reasons for the destruction of the Hittite empire at the end of the 13th century BCE, during the reign of Shuppiluliumas II (ca 1210-1190 BCE), the last Hittite king - the other reason being the dissension at the periphery of the empire and the ever-increasing pressures from the Sea Peoples and other outside elements such as the Phrygians (Kempinski 1979:39). Pagan, the ruler of Alashiya/Cyprus, also requested food supplies from Ugarit. In a semi-arid region such as Syria, where summer, 'if not actually a season of sterility ... is nevertheless a season of

tension,' the timely arrival of the spring rains (the 'later rains'/'latter rains' of the Hebrew Bible; Dt 11:14) is of paramount importance to the success of the coming season's crop. It is, thus, not surprising that the Ba'al texts have, as a predominant theme, 'the tension between fertility and sterility' and describe the main antagonist of the fertility god, Ba'al, as Mot (the power of death, drought and sterility; Gray 1965:12). The Canaanites, like their neighbours in Egypt and Mesopotamia, 'were incapable of intellectual or speculative detachment [and] were emotionally involved' (my insertion) with the recurrent cycle of nature (Gray 1965:13).

Against the background of a dramatic climate shift, the sources referring to Canaan during the 13th - 12 centuries BCE are also better understood. In a letter found at Aphek, the Ugaritic commissioner makes an otherwise surprising request to the Egyptian prefect of Canaan to restore his consignment of 15 metric tons of wheat to him; after all, international commerce during the Late Bronze Age was largely concerned with luxury goods (ie, the wheat transaction must therefore have been due to somewhat unusual circumstances; Na'aman 1994:244). Large quantities of grain are mentioned in the ostraca from Lachish and Tel Sera' (ca the time of Ramesses III) and Na'aman (1994:244) has suggested that this 'may well reflect an Egyptian effort to store grain in the face of the long drought and famine' in that period.

We know from Akkadian texts that a famine, at the beginning of the 11th century BCE, caused Aramaeans to move to Mesopotamia and it may well have forced others to move south (Ahlström 1990:77-78). Mesopotamian written documentation from the period under consideration is rather scanty (Neumann & Parpola 1987:171-172). With the exception of a few scattered royal inscriptions, virtually no contemporary texts such as legal documents or administrative records are extant from either 1200 -1150 BCE or the more important period from 1050 to 900 BCE. It is, therefore, highly significant that the few sources available, when supplemented by secondary sources such as omens, poetic narratives and incidental historical references in later texts, contain numerous references to negative developments (more or less evenly distributed over the whole period) which are likely to have resulted from unusually arid conditions (crop failures, famines, high grain prices, massive nomad incursions). At the same time, allusions to good crops, favourable grain prices, and the like, are almost totally lacking. By comparison, texts from a well-documented sub-period of 70 years (735 - 665 BCE), have few references to drought, crop failures and famines, speaking instead of

abundant rains,  heavy snow, excessive floods, high water levels, good crops and favourable grain rates (Neumann & Parpola 1987:175). Although the textual evidence has many limitations - these sources can hardly be considered to be meteorological records and they are dated only approximately - it generally agrees with the nontextual evidence that the period 1200 - 900 BCE was relatively dry, while that after 900 BCE was comparatively moist (Neumann & Parpola 1987:177).

What the factors were that led to a warm period from 1200 to 900 BCE in parts of Europe and the Near East remain uncertain. While Neumann and Parpola (1987:169-170, n 38) reject volcanic activity as the cause, they have suggested that it may have been due to an increase in the solar output, at least in the visible portion of the spectrum. The use of advanced models of the general circulation of the atmosphere shows that an increase of even 1% in the solar constant - provided the change is sustained - leads to noteworthy changes in temperature and precipitation. Modern technology has shown that the solar constant is not as 'constant' as once thought. Small changes in the constant have been measured using satellites flying 'above' the atmosphere. Although the changes are far below 1%, it should be borne in mind that the period of observation involved is far too short to be able to make any extrapolations for the years 1200 - 900 BCE.

### 5.2.2 The Dead Sea as a sensitive recorder of Near East climate variability

The surface of the Dead Sea receives less than 100mm/annum and, being a terminal lake which drains one of the largest hydrological systems in the Near East, its level depends primarily on the precipitation received in its northern headwaters. This area experiences a Mediterranean climate (ie, the winters are wet, while the summers are dry) and most of the precipitation received originates in the North Atlantic, with the Mediterranean Sea acting as a secondary moisture source. Thus, according to Migowski *et al* (2006:421), 'the Dead Sea can be viewed as a large rain gauge for the Near East region and in turn a sensitive recorder of Near East climate variability.'

In response to climatic shifts, the level of the Dead Sea has fluctuated throughout history. During the period 1997-2005, for example, its level has dropped by 6mm, from 412m below

mean sea level (m bmsl) to 418 m bmsl (Frumkin & Elitzur 2002:335; Migowski *et al* 2006:421), while its shores have retreated by about 1m/year (mainly due to human interference, but also, presumably, because of global warming). The Dead Sea has two sub-basins; the northern basin (ca 300m deep) is separated from the shallow southern basin by a sill at about 400m bmsl. Extreme arid events causing the water level in the northern basin to drop significantly below the sill would, ultimately, cause the southern basin to dry out. In order to flood the southern basin (where evaporation is more rapid) and raise the level of the lake significantly, a substantial increase in precipitation in the drainage area is required - substantially more than the amount simply required to raise the lake level above the sill (Migowski *et al* 2006:422).

Migowski *et al* (2006:422-426) have reconstructed a comprehensive record of lake level changes based on the detailed lithological and mineralogical information derived from three, well-dated sediment cores recovered from the fast retreating modern shores of the northern basin of Dead Sea; this information was then stratigraphically and lithologically correlated and compared with the exposed sections in modern near-shore gullies. The results obtained suggest that, during the period 8000 to 1350 BCE, there were two major wet phases (ca 8000-6600 and 3600-1500 BCE), a long dry phase (ca 6200-3600 BCE) and multiple abrupt arid phases (ca 6600, 6200, 2200, 1500 BCE) in the eastern Mediterranean paleoclimate. As pointed out earlier, these events appear to coincide with major breaks in the cultural evolution of the Near East, suggesting that there is a sensitive relationship between society and environment.

Although the period from about 1500 to 1200 BCE was comparatively cool, favouring (on average) increased precipitation (Neuman & Parpola 1987:162), of significance here is the abrupt climatic deterioration around 1500 BCE, when the lake level was at approximately 417m bmsl and then dropped about 35m in the following less than 200 years. This rapid climate deterioration occurred around the same time as the fall of the Canaanite city-states (1300-1200 BCE), although warfare is the generally accepted reason for their demise (Migowski *et al* 2006:426-427).

On the basis of all lines of evidence (previously published geological and archaeological evidence, as well as the imprecise biblical indicators) of Dead Sea levels, Frumkin and Elitzur (2002:334-342) have reconstructed the history of lake-level fluctuations during the Iron Age.

Geological evidence indicates that the Dead Sea level was above 390m bmsl during the period between about 1500 and 1200 BCE and that, between about 1200 and 500 BCE, the level fell off to below 390m bmsl (ie, slightly above the floor of the southern basin but, nevertheless, close to the threshold level of the sill). It is not, however, clear whether the southern basin was completely dry (Frumkin & Elitzur 2002:338).

Three archaeological Iron Age sites, which were flooded during periods of high water level and which reappeared when the level dropped, are significant. The first, Mesad Gozal, is in the southern basin near to Mount Sedom (Jebel Usdum). The pottery found there was dated to between about 1100 and 900 BCE (Aharoni 1964:113), while the floor level of the building is at 388m bmsl. Since it is presumed to have been a fortress (probably Edomite and destroyed during David's reign; cf 2 Sm 8:12-14; 1 Ki 11:15-16; 1 Chr 18:12-13), the Dead Sea level was obviously lower than that and, in all likelihood, probably considerably lower. The other two sites, Rujm el-Bahr and Khirbet Mazin (possibly, biblical Midin; Jos 15:61), are located on the shores of the northern basin and would seem to have been used as docks for boats; both were dated, by Bar-Adon (1989; cited by Frumkin & Elitzur 2002:338), to about 800 to 600 BCE. The effective water level for the anchoring of boats at the former is 400m bmsl and at the latter it is 395m bmsl, suggesting that the Dead Sea fluctuated about 5m (from 400-395m bmsl), during that two-century period. In other words, the southern basin may have been shallowly filled by the Dead Sea from about 1100 to 900 BCE and may have been dry, or almost dry, from about 800 to 600 BCE; however, the evidence is inconclusive.

The Hebrew Bible mentions 'the Valley of Salt' (*gai ha-melah*) five times as the battlefield where thousands of Edomites were defeated, first by king David (ca 1004-965 BCE; 2 Sm 8:13; 1 Chr 18:12; Ps 59:17) and then by king Amaziah (ca 798-769 BCE; 2 Ki 14:7; 2 Chr 25:11). The word *gai*, in biblical Hebrew, is used for a narrow ravine (as in Jos 8:11) or a wide plain (as in Dt 34:6). Presumably, here the context implies the latter. Frumkin and Elitzur (2002:341), thus conclude that the battlefield was probably the dry southern basin (or, at least, a significant part of it), since it is associated with Edom and there is no other 'geographical feature that fits this term.' In other words, during the period 1200 and 700 BCE (or, at least, during the period when this biblical record was written and edited, since there is no 'updating comment;' cf 'the Valley of Siddim [that is, the Salt Sea]'; Gn 14:3), the level of the Dead Sea had dropped below 400m bmsl.

## 5.3 THE WOODLANDS OF THE HILL COUNTRY OF PALESTINE

Despite all the excavations that have been carried out in the highlands of Palestine, archaeologists have rarely recorded evidence useful for reconstructing the ancient environment (Stager 1985a:4). As a consequence, the real picture of the landscape during the Bronze and the Iron Ages remains unknown. However, an approximate idea can be derived from inferences drawn from a variety of sources such as phytogeography, texts (particularly the Hebrew Bible and the Amarna Letters) and settlement patterns.

Phytogeographers have demonstrated that the elevated areas of Western Asia, although bare and eroded today, were forested during prehistoric times. However, until fairly recently, it was thought that the expansion of urban civilization which took place throughout much of Western Asia at the beginning of the Bronze Age, with its concomitant sharp and enduring increase in the demand for timber, would have destroyed these forests and woodlands. Rowton (1967:261-277), using cuneiform sources (ca 90% of which are from the period 1250-550 BCE) and the, less reliable, ancient 'tree-toponyms' (the epithets used for mountains derived from their most conspicuous timber, that are found in historical, literary, religious and lexical sources; eg, the alternative names for Mt. Hermon and Mt Lebanon were Cedar Mountain and Cypress Mountain, respectively), has shown this view to be mistaken (Rowton 1967:261-262, 267,276).

The continued existence of forests does not necessarily depend on climate. Even in times of drought, provided there is sufficient minimum precipitation and soil in which to grow, forests are able to endure. The most common soil in the hill country of Palestine is the fertile, shallow (often less than 50cm deep), red to brownish-red *terra rossa* which has a clay content usually above 50% (Stager 1985a:4). Although it is able to hold moisture well, it has poor resistance to erosion, especially on slopes where the forest canopy has been denuded. Soil erosion, in turn, prevents the regrowth of the forest. Lower precipitation only means fewer kinds of trees, not necessarily fewer trees. Trees such as the oak and the terebinth, both known from biblical

sources,[29] are able to survive these conditions. In addition, their root systems are particularly suitable for the prevention of soil erosion. The amount of soil available depends on the presence of not only trees but also on the degree of bush cover present to prevent soil erosion (Rowton 1967:265-266,274).

Reference to forests in cuneiform sources is comparatively rare. The Amarna correspondence, for example, makes no mention of forests, although many of the events and towns are located in forest country. This, however, does not imply that forests did not exist. After all, as Rowton (1967:275) has pointed out, 'why waste precious tablet space' on something that was common knowledge? Nevertheless, there are sufficient ancient sources from Egypt mentioning forests in the Lebanon and the adjacent parts of Syria and Palestine, usually concerning the provenance of timber during the course of military expeditions (Rowton 1967:262), to suggest that throughout the Bronze Age and for several centuries thereafter the mountainous areas were considered to be the domain of the forest. Even as late as at the beginning of the 19th century, the process of deforestation and erosion was not yet complete. In other words, this process is a relatively slow one.

Rowton has shown that the forests in the mountainous areas and urban settlement in the lowlands were able to coexist over prolonged periods of time (1967:263-265) and that remnants of forest in almost all the regions mentioned in this connection have survived into recent times (1967:265-274). For example, substantial forest can be shown to have existed, right down to the Hellenistic period, in the comparatively small mountain range which extends southwards from the mouth of the Orontes into the Upper Galilee, despite the number of towns in the immediate proximity (eg, Sidon, Tyre, Byblos, Ugarit, Alalakh, Hazor, etc). Even today, in the northern part of the Lebanon, the process of deforestation is still far from

29 There appears to be some uncertainty as to which words should be translated 'oak' and which 'terebinth' (Masterman 2008, in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Online*). In recent revisions of English versions of the Hebrew Bible, 'terebinth' has been increasingly added in the margin. All the Hebrew words which are used for these trees are closely allied (*'elah* (eg, 'the oak;' Gn35:4; Jdg 6:11,19; 2 Sm 18:9-10)/*'allah* (apparently a slight variant for *'elah*; Jos 24:26)/*'elim* (perhaps the plural of *'elah*; eg, Is 1:29)/*'elon* (eg, 'the oak of Moreh;' Gn 12:6; margin notes 'or terebinth'/*'allon* ('Allon-bacuth;' Gn 35:8; margin notes 'the Oak of weeping;' compare Gn 35:4)). Masterman has suggested that these words 'may originally have had simply the meaning of "tree" but it is clear that, when the Old Testament was written, they indicated some special kind of tree.' He has suggested further, that the words *'elah*, *'allah* and *'elim* refer to the terebinth and that *'elon* and *'allon* are most probably correctly translated 'oak' - an opinion wholeheartedly supported by Zohary (1982:111).

complete (Rowton 1967:265). Less than a century ago, remnants of oak and pine forest existed in the Jerusalem-Hebron-Jaffa region, while a substantial woodland (although the total area is far from large) has survived in the Ajlun (ancient Gilead; Rowton 1967:266). The Hebrew Bible tells us that Gilead was a forested region (2 Sm 18:8) and that ancient Bashan which lay between Gilead and Mt. Hermon was an oak woodland (Is 2:13; 33:9; Ezk 27:6; Zch 11:2).

It seems fair to assume that a significant amount of forest would have survived in the hill country of Palestine, right up until to the end of the Bronze Age, and even later. Although the central range and northern slopes had experienced extensive deforestation during the Middle Bronze period, the survey of the territory of Ephraim undertaken by Finkelstein (1988:200) has demonstrated that during the Late Bronze period the arboreal vegetation had partially renewed itself on the slopes, especially in those areas not used intensively by pastoral groups. This survey, as well as those undertaken in Manasseh, Benjamin, and Judah, all indicate that the earliest settlers in the hill country of Palestine were not faced with densely wooded areas, since they inhabited the desert fringe, the small intermontane valleys of the northern central range and the Bethel plateau (Finkelstein 1988:198), while the densely wooded areas were located further to the west, on the slopes and in the foothills. It was only later when the population densities in many parts had increased (particularly, those areas without much bottomland) - and, presumably, as the drought progressed - that the settlement spread to the more wooded western slopes. These more densely wooded areas would, however, have been in a transitional stage. The forest would have already thinned out and these areas would have consisted of a mixture of trees, bush and pasture, in other words, ‘woodland’ (Rowton 1967:277), and would have contained some of the best grazing land in Palestine.

New strategies would have been required as the Iron I settler population grew, in order to increase agricultural productivity in the limited environment of the hill country. No doubt, this caused extensive deforestation (perhaps, as succinctly described in Jos 17:16-18). According to Stager (1985a:4), at least as early as 1200 BCE, the population densities in some areas were sufficiently great to begin the process of converting hillsides into agricultural terraces and he is of the opinion (1985a:5) that: ‘Of all the technologies and techniques available to the Iron Age settlers, none served them better than agricultural terracing, which helped to open up the highland frontier to the Iron Age farmers.’ The best-dated examples of

Iron Age I terraces come from just outside the village of 'Ai; the slopes below Khirbet Raddana were also terraced in the 12th - 11th centuries BCE (Stager 1982:116).

## 5.4 THE SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY OF THE HILL COUNTRY SETTLERS IN IRON I

The challenges facing the settlers included the variable and often unreliable rainfall, the dearth of dependable water sources for domestic use (and none, to speak of, for irrigation purposes), a rugged terrain with an almost complete absence of flat areas, the shallow and stony ground, which was prone to soil erosion when cleared of the thickets of pines, oaks and dense shrubs (Hillel 2006:150).

The rain in Israel usually begins in October or November and ceases in April. Although, in a good year, the annual precipitation in the rain-fed domain may exceed 1000mm, the potential evaporation rate in summer exceeds 1000mm and so crop production, in an area lacking irrigation,[30] depends entirely on the preceding winter's residual soil moisture (Hillel 2006:142). The main soils of the highlands are *terra rossa* and *rendzina*, both of which are capable of retaining moisture. However, this ability depends on the depth of the soil and it is only on flat plateaus, and especially the intermontane valleys, that the soil depth exceeds 0.6m. In addition, south-facing slopes tend to be much drier than north-facing slopes, since the moisture from the former may be lost at twice the rate of that from the latter (Hillel 2006:146,149).

The settlers were utterly dependent on timely rains ('the early and later rain' (Dt 11:13-14); 'the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain' (Jr 5:24)). The early rains were required for germination and early seedling growth; the mid-season rains for subsequent growth - especially in those areas where the soil was shallow or coarse-textured; and the late rains for the ripening of the grain and fruit (Hillel 2006:157). The importance of the rain to the Israelites is underlined by the number of names for rain in Hebrew (eg, *delef*, *geshem*, *matar*, *mimtar*, *nezel*, *raviv*, *sagrir*, *seirim*). The onset of the wet season (early rain; *yoreh*), which

30 I was interested to note that the word *ba'al* has been retained as a word in Hebrew and Arabic, with reference to rain-fed farming (Hillel 2006: 302, n 23).

lasts from autumn to spring, usually occurs in October or November. If it arrives too early, it is likely to be followed by a dry spell which would probably kill the young seedlings; if the *yoreh* is either too scanty or arrives too late, the dry season may arrive before the seedlings have grown and matured sufficiently. The final rain (*malkosh*) usually arrives in April, at grain-setting and -maturing time. Should the *malkosh* be too early or too late, the crop yield is likely to be limited; in addition, harvesting, threshing and preparations for summer crop-planting are likely to be hindered (Hillel 2006:317, n 12). 'There is no mistaking that this is a very high-risk environment' (Hopkins 1987:184).

Iron I sites in the hill country of western Palestine display all the characteristics of an extremely conservative, settling society, as opposed to a deeply rooted one (Rosen 1994:339,346). Practically nothing was added; all the selected material components and behavioural practices that were used were those already well-known from local Mediterranean agriculture. The agrarian roots of the inhabitants of Iron I houses is obvious from even a cursory glance at their contents - these houses belonged to farmers and herders. Those at 'Ai and Raddana, for example, contained many implements for processing cereals, such as large stone saddle querns, stone 'mortars,' rounded pestles and flint blade segments (once part of compound sickle tools). The predominant pottery artifacts are coarse-ware containers, such as the ubiquitous collared-rim *pithoi* and cooking pots (Stager 1985a:11-12). At Giloh, these cooking pots, storage jars, and *pithoi* together make up 79% of the whole pottery repertoire (Mazar 1981:31).

The faunal assemblages from Iron I sites are dominated by ovine bones. The second most important species were the bovines. As mentioned earlier, pig bones are extremely rare or are

completely absent.[31] Rosen (1994:345) sees the economic value of herds, in order of importance, as being 'wool - meat - leather - manure - bones - horns.' Remains of asses (perhaps used for ploughing) and dogs (probably associated with herding) have been found and hunting appears to have played a secondary, but nevertheless, significant role in the economy. The horse is absent (although already present in the region) and little use was made of the camel, the chicken and the pig. Considering the unique ability of the domesticated pig to produce highly usable meat proteins and fats from Mediterranean pasture (see below), as well as its presence in the Bronze Age and perhaps even earlier, pig meat seems to have been consciously omitted from the settlers' diets (Rosen 1994:339-343).

Where botanical analysis has been carried out, wheat and barley (one or the other, or both) have been found at every Iron I site, while storage silos and carbonised seeds are almost as ubiquitous. Cereal growing was, surprisingly, minimal at Giloh, a 'fortified herdsmen's village' (Mazar 1981:32); such an apparently monocultural economic base was, however, rather risky since it 'is very susceptible to droughts, animal diseases, and predation by carnivores' (Rosen 1994:349; 'Izbet Sartah, where there is evidence for both silos and animals, on the other hand, 'offered the population a better chance of survival in bad times'). Flocks and herds have the 'ability to act as a kind of storage - "a disaster bank on the hoof" - subject to a different set of constraints than agriculture and capable of receiving deposits in good years and withstanding withdrawals in years when crops do not suffice' (Hopkins 1987:188). The unambiguous public storage buildings at Shiloh (Finkelstein 1988:220,222,233) - a site with strong cultic connections - demonstrates a communal expression of the need to store foods; Hopkins (1987:188) has suggested that the existence of these buildings 'testifies to the role played by

31 Should the majority of the settlers have originally been sedentarized people from the lowlands of Palestine (as postulated at the outset), where pig bones are fairly typical of the older Canaanite sites on the coastal plain (Hesse 1990:208,211), it is surprising that they did not continue that tradition. After all, the woodlands would have been ideal for pig farming and one would have expected them to continue a well-established tradition. According to Rainey (2008a:49), the settlers 'were not accustomed to raising pigs because they did not have them in their former habitat' - something that would seem to support his theory that the settlers originated from the steppe land east of the Jordan, where the climate is too arid for pig farming. The distribution of domestic pigs in the Middle East during the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Ages was closely correlated with environmental conditions. Almost all sites were situated in areas which currently receive a rainfall of more than 350mm per annum; in addition, pigs 'are *not* a component of nomadism' (Grigson 1995:254), being difficult to move and herd when compared to sheep and goats; they also have no sweat glands, making them extremely susceptible to heat (Harding 1982b:3; Rainey 2008a:49).

the religious institutions of early Israel in structuring the emerging society.'

The cultivation of fruit trees (olives, grapevines and those of secondary significance such as almonds, pomegranates, figs and wild pears), which are traditionally second to cereals amongst the crops of the Mediterranean peoples are common to both the preceding and subsequent eras. Their absence during Iron I is, however, not surprising when one considers the lengthy time delay between investment and gain in the case of fruit trees, as opposed to cereals (less than a year). Moreover, much of the capital investment which would have had to be made in installations for edible secondary products can neither be moved nor transferred (Rosen 1994:345). Ovine herds are movable and, in times of drought, cereal fields can be used as pasture, while intact silos are able to preserve grain for a considerable period of time. In addition, oil and wine alone would have been unable to supply the nutritional needs of the settlers, who would have thus required some sort of exchange system. A diet based on cereals alone is also not adequate, since it is likely to produce several deficiency syndromes (eg, as a result of a deficiency of amino acids and vitamins). Presumably legumes were cultivated; there is, however, little concrete evidence for this. Protein deficiencies were probably corrected by the consumption of the milk and meat from ovine herds, as well as wild plants (Rosen 1994:342-343,348).

The highlands villages were quite modest and show minimal investment in permanent structures. These consisted of little more than simple pillared houses with pens for herds, cisterns for storing water and silos for the storage of grains, the pens and silos strongly influencing the layout. The size and layout of the buildings, as well as the size of the silos (simply built walled pits surrounded by packed earth), clearly indicate that they were intended for the use of the nuclear or extended family (Stager 1985a:17-23; Rosen 1994:343-344). Two or three of the individual houses were usually grouped together to form a sort of 'family compound' reflecting the biblical ideal of the *mishpahah*, or 'extended multiple-generation family.' The Iron I house-plans and village layouts have, in fact, been ingeniously connected by Stager (1985a:11ff) to the scattered references to family and social structure, as well as to village life, in the Books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel. He has pointed out, for example, with regard to the description of *bet* Micah in Judges 17-18, that: 'Regardless of the date one ascribes to this passage [Jdg 18:22], it provides a fairly detailed description of the living *bet 'av*, in this case a large and affluent one, and its physical compound' (my insertion) (Stager

1985a:22). There is little evidence of trade - the settlements are not only quite remote from each other, they were also isolated from the regional trade routes - and, presumably, the settlers were, to a large extent, economically independent (Rosen 1994:346; Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:110). Even though signs of metalworking activity are evident at a few sites, the ubiquitous usage of the Canaanite flint blade would tend to support Mazar's proposal (1985:68) that the settlers were a '... poor, self-sufficient and introvert society.' That the settlers appear to have carried on the traditions of Canaanite agriculture - no new methods or domesticated plant species were introduced - would support the proposal that they were originally Canaanites.

## 5.5 EDIBLE WILD PLANTS AND PLANT PRODUCTS OF THE PALESTINIAN HIGHLANDS

Although farming resulted in an increasing dependence on a much smaller repertoire of 'domesticated' wild plants, the knowledge of edible wild plants has not disappeared from the collective memory of humanity. Millions of people, in fact, especially those in developing countries, still rely on edible wild plants as a food source, particularly during periods of food crisis. Many are also used for medicinal purposes - an interesting topic in itself. However, this discussion will be limited to wild plants as a source of food.

In 1896, for example, during the drought in KwaZulu-Natal, which was accompanied by locust swarms, crop failure and tsetse flies, the people were able to survive on wild plants such as the smooth sow thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), cooked as a green vegetable (Viall 1995:11). Even today, those of us in South Africa who are close to the soil, know and eat such 'weeds' as *veldkool* (*Trachyandra hispida* and *ciliata*), the cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* subsp. *unguiculata*) and those loosely grouped together under the term *imfino*/*morogo* (eg, *Chenopodium album* (fat hen) and *Amaranthus thunbergii*; the latter is known to be highly nutritious, having a protein content of up to 36%, as well as being rich in vitamins A and C; Madisa & Tshamekang 1997:150).

We know little regarding the full spectrum of plants eaten by the settlers in the hill country of Palestine. The analysis and interpretation of assemblages of plant remains recovered from a

particular archaeological site is, unfortunately, rare. However, several new methods are now available which could be used to fill in the gaps. In addition, too little attention appears to have been paid to ceramic artifacts used in processing plant foods and for other subsistence-related activities. The ceramic matrices of potsherds, for example, may be able to yield information about vessel usage (Hill & Evans 1989:419).

### 5.5.1 New scientific methods available for the tentative identification of at least some of the foodstuffs consumed by the settlers

'The importance of wild foods even in the diets of the most sedentary and agriculturally intensive villages of the ancient Near East should probably receive more attention, especially from archaeologists' (Hopkins 1985:114-115). Several new techniques have recently become available, such as phytolith analysis, isoenzyme analysis and anatomical micromorphology (Harris & Hillman 1989a:1-2). In addition, radiocarbon-dating by accelerator mass spectrometry now allows extremely small samples (< 5mg) to be dated accurately. It is worth pointing out that the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project has recently set up two laboratories: one in the actual excavation area and a second at the nearby field camp, enabling organic and inorganic samples from the trenches to be identified and analysed, as they are excavated (Maeir & Weiner 2009:35-36). The laboratories are equipped with instruments for infrared spectroscopy, optical microscopy, UV-VIS spectroscopy, flotation, and phytolith concentration. A radiocarbon-dating expert is also included in the team to ensure the quality of the samples, enabling a change of excavation tactics within minutes or, at most, hours thus allowing a better allocation of resources. Infrared spectroscopy has, for example, shown that most of the floors at Gath were made of crushed chalk, rather than plaster (Maeir & Weiner 2009:36). With my background in organic and analytical chemistry, should I have been born 40 or so years later, I would, most certainly, have chosen a different career path!

One of the newer methods is the chemical analysis of organic residues recoverable from excavated pieces of pottery (ceramics, having a rough surface, tend to retain food particles even after washing), a method first demonstrated by Evans and Biek in 1976 (Hill & Evans 1989:419). Hill and Evans (1989:421-424) have, for example, used this method to identify

Pacific food plants from potsherds, dating to as early as 50 ce (uncalibrated radiocarbon date) and they have no doubt that the method would be useful for even earlier samples. Residues from potsherds appear to suffer little denaturation during deposition (charring, for example, produces a protective layer of heavily charred material, which protects the plant tissues below from further degradation as well as from decomposition by microorganisms). The residues are examined under a scanning electron microscope for any recognizable tissues, especially plant tissues, which could be histologically identified. The residues are then examined using infrared spectroscopy for any organic compounds. Should the latter be present, the material is extracted using a wide variety of solvents (from the most non-polar to the most polar; depending on the solvent used, various types of compounds such as triglycerides, waxes, tree resins, phospholipids, sugars, amino acids, etc can be isolated). Each extract is then subjected to a battery of tests including gas/liquid chromatography, high performance liquid chromatography, ultraviolet spectroscopy and electrophoresis. All identification peaks from the resultant spectra are then compared to the diagnostic peaks from 'standard' spectra, obtained by the analysis of modern food plants using comparable analytical methods (Hill & Evans 1989:419-420; see also Dvory Namdar 2009:30,32-33).

Another new development in bioarchaeological methods is DNA-based analysis, which is better known from studies of human origins (Jones, Brown & Allaby 1996:96-99). The method has, however, been successfully used to track the spread of early agricultural crops and for comparisons between cultivars and their wild progenitors. In my opinion, the method would be ideal for the identification of the foods consumed by particular groups of people during particular eras. In morphological terms, the two principal materials of archaeobotany are seeds and pollen and the most commonly encountered preservation categories are charring/carbonization, dessication, mineralization and waterlogging. In each case, wheat DNA, for example, has been successfully identified in specimens of between 1000 and 3300 years old (Jones *et al* 1996:98). Desiccation, which would be expected to occur in the dry environment of Southwest Asia, is one of the most favourable preservation conditions, since biochemical transformation is severely restricted. Although charring is the more ubiquitous process accounting for most archaeobotanical samples, several researchers have, surprisingly enough, shown that charred/carbonised grains retain a sufficient range of biomolecules for the analysis. Bioarchaeological specimens are dated radiometrically, the DNA is amplified and

sequenced and the results could then be compared with DNA sequences from likely food sources from a particular area (Jones *et al* 1996:98-99).

Coprolite (Greek: *kopros*, 'dung' and *lithos*, 'stone') analysis is potentially one of the most precise methods available to archaeologists for reconstructing the diets of ancient peoples (it has been used, for example, to identify the seeds of wild, ie, uncultivated plants) and it also may be able to shed light on the diet of the settlers in the highlands of Palestine (Heizer & Napton 1969:563-564). Arid climates are particularly suitable for the preservation of organic materials in human excrement, since bacterial decay is wholly or, at least partially, inhibited. As early as 1936, Volney Jones (cited by Heizer & Napton 1969:564) was able to identify seeds of marsh elder (*Iva*), sunflower (*Helianthus*) and chenopods, as well as pieces of acorn and hickory nuts, in coprolites from a dry rock-shelter in Kentucky, whilst in the same year TB Margath identified seeds of sumac (*Rhus*) and acorns from the faecal material in the intestinal tract of a desiccated human body discovered in a bluff rock-shelter in Arkansas. Since then, newer techniques yielding adequately controlled data have been developed. Unfortunately, coprolite analysis is rarely done with this aim in mind; most coprolite analyses have been done in order to identify the possible presence of pathogens/parasites, or to generate other biomedical information.

### 5.5.2 Potential food sources

The Hebrew Bible makes it very clear that plants were extremely important in the daily existence of the people of ancient Israel and mention is made of 110 plants. According to Michael Zohary (1982:28): 'The Bible is perhaps the most pervaded with nature of all scriptures or ritual-historical works.' In addition, there are many biblical allusions, parables and metaphors confirming just how vitally important plants were (eg, agricultural metaphors (eg, Is 9:3; 16:9-10; Jr 4:3), parables of plants and people (eg, Jdg 9:8-15; Ezk 17:1-10), climatic conditions (eg, Dt 11:13-14; Is 21:1), pastoral and agricultural activities of the Israelites (eg, Is 40:11; Jr 23:1-4; Lv 25:2-6), the Song of Songs (Can 1:1ff), 'an ode to the love of nature and to love in nature' (Hillel 2006:257) and the song of the vineyard (Is 5:1-2), while trees and fruits of various kinds were often used 'as symbols of beauty and bounty' (Ps

92:12; Zohary 1982:48). Even biblical places were often named after plants (eg, Rimmon (Jos 15:32; 'pomegranate'); Betonim (Jos 13:26; 'pistachios'); Entappuah (Jos 17:7; 'spring of the apricot'); Borowski 1979:19-20).

The biblical field crops were wheat, emmer, barley and sorghum, with wheat and barley being the most important (wheat and barley are, in fact, mentioned first among the 'seven species' with which the Land of Israel is said to have been blessed, the others being fruits - grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates ('honey;' Dt 8:8)). The biblical vegetable garden was, however, sadly lacking in variety, the main crops being leeks, onions, garlic, lentils, chick-peas and broad beans. Presumably, the settlers would have relied on wild plants (*esev ha-sadeh*, ie, 'the plants of the field'; Gn 3:18; 2 Ki 4:38-41 (the 'death in the pot' in v 40 was possibly the result of the accidental gathering of wild watermelon-gourds - *Citrullus colocynthis* - which are known to be poisonous)) as dietary supplements, just as many peasant women do today (Zohary 1982:41,72-73; Hillel 2006:301, n 20).

There are 2682 different plant species within the boundaries of Israel - an abundance which is related to three main factors (Danin 1995:24). Firstly, Israel's geographical position lies in a zone where several plant geographic regions meet, each with its own typical flora. Secondly, the topography, the number of different soil types, as well as the climatic transition between the relatively moist northern area and the southern desert provides a variety of different habitats able to support these species. Finally, a number of alien species have been introduced into synanthropic habitats (ie, those created by human activity), because of the stresses on the existing flora caused by constant cultivation and grazing by domestic animals.

It has been suggested (Michael Zohary (1983); cited by Danin 1995:37) that the present day flora of Israel consists of those plant species that managed to survive the intensive human activity of the last millennia. Danin, however, has concluded that the flora is substantially the same today, as it was in the past, as witnessed by the lists of plants encountered in excavations at archaeological sites - the only change being in the proportions of plant populations. Human and animal activities such as the gathering of fruits and plants 'did not change the vegetation and natural conditions,' in the way that they do today. The proportions of those populations sensitive to certain environmental stresses have decreased, while those of resistant plants, have increased. In other words, irrespective of whether woodlands were replaced by herbaceous vegetation, or vice versa, 'very few plant species are known to have become

extinct during the Holocene' (Danin 1995:37; see also Hopkins 1987:180).

As Hopkins (1985:115) has pointed out: 'The vegetation of Highland Canaan would surely have provided ample opportunity and even incentive for the collection and use of wild produce.' There is, unfortunately, only occasional evidence for the use of wild plants as contributors of calories and vitamins to the diet of the settlers. Pollen analysis has, for example, attested to traces of *Malva* (mallow) species in Beersheba (Rosen 1994:342). The leaves of *Malva* species are still used today in soups and salads in rural Palestine (Zohary 1982:99). *Malva sylvestris*, for example, is called *khubeiza* (bread) in the Arab villages of Palestine (Hillel 2006:301, n 20). Presumably, the trees of the woodlands were used in construction (eg, wooden beams to support ceilings; Stager 1985a:15-16), to supply fuel for cooking, heating, the firing of pottery, in metalworking and in the manufacture of lime. Rosen (1994:342-343) has suggested that 'the use of the Rothem bush as firewood, even away from its natural habitat, may have had a cultural significance.' This tall shrub (*Retama raetam*; white broom; the 'broom' of 1 Ki 19:4 and Job 30:3-4; Hebrew: *rothem*) is found in the desert areas of Palestine and is largely confined to the sandy soils of the coastal plains and the wadi beds and stony hills of the central and southern Negev. Its roots are excellent heating and cooking fuels (Zohary 1982:34,144).

The gathering, processing and consuming of edible wild plants are still important activities in the hill country of Palestine, as has been shown recently by Ali-Shtayeh *et al* (2008). Fifteen small communities in five districts, in the Northern West Bank in the Palestinian Authority, were selected for this study. These communities are located mainly within homogenous mountainous, rural areas which rely on rain-fed farming for crops such as barley, wheat and fruit trees (olives, grapes, almonds, figs, etc); they also keep flocks of sheep, goats and cattle, as well as poultry.

The most widely used plant parts of the 100 species gathered and consumed are leaves (24%) and stems (21%); some are eaten raw in salads (eg, *Origanum syriacum*[32] and *Foeniculum vulgare*) while others are cooked, using local traditional recipes (eg, *Rumex acetosa* and *Malva sylvestris* are fried in olive oil and *Gundelia tournefortii* is especially favoured as an

32 It should be noted that Ali-Shtayeh *et al* (2008) refer to this plant as *Majorana syriaca*. From a taxonomic point of view, however, its correct name is *Origanum syriacum* (*International Plant Names Index* 1996).

ingredient for omelettes). Other wild plant species in the 'most often used' category (in all five areas) are the leaves of *Arum palaestinum* (which are boiled in several changes of water to remove toxic substances, before frying in olive oil and then garnishing with lemon), *Cylclamen persicum, Salvia fruticosa*, *Matricaria aurea*, *Micromeria fruticosa* and *Trigonella foenum-graecum*. Some have a long history in traditional culture and are considered holy plants. *Origanum syriacum* (Syrian hyssop; Hebrew: *ezov*), for example, is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in Exodus 12:22, where it is used as a brush to sprinkle blood on the doorposts and lintels (others references include 1 Ki 4:23 and Ps 51:7). It was also used in the ritual for cleansing from leprosy (Lv 14:4-7,49-51), the ritual of the Red Heifer (Nm 19) and is referred to in the Psalms (eg, Ps 51). It is worth noting that Hawley (2004) has recently suggested, using epigraphic, etymological and literary factors, as well as contextual analogies drawn from the mechanics of Ugaritian magic in theory and practice, that the word *uzb* in the Ugaritic incantation RS 92.2014 should be interpreted as Syrian hyssop (*Origanum syriacum*).

Others are thought of as sacred/blessed and are mentioned in the legends concerning holy people (eg, *Salvia fruticosa* and the Virgin Mary; the plant is, in fact, called *Mariamieh* after her; it is also recognised by Palestinian Muslims in Northern Israel for its ritual importance in funerals and cemeteries), while some are even mentioned in local folkloric songs and proverbs. The most popular food botanical families are Asteraceae, Fabaceae (as vegetables) and Lamiaceae (especially as herbal teas and seasoning; Ali-Shtayeh *et al* 2008). I was interested to note that both *Origanum syriacum* and *Salvia fructicosa* have been recognised as valuable edible wild plants and have been proclaimed protected shrubs by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in the West Bank in 1996.

Until the full spectrum of plants eaten by the hill country settlers has been determined, however, any further comments remain pure speculation. Nevertheless, to illustrate just how valuable wild plants and their products could have been, one example will suffice: oaks and acorns. The dominant constituent of the arboreal vegetation of the hill country of Palestine is the evergreen oak (*Quercus calliprinos* (Hebrew: *'elon/'allon;*); Zohary 1982:28). Wherever oaks are to be found, acorns have been used as food for thousands of years.

The exploitation of *dehesas* (managed open oak groves) as a source of food, fodder, fuel and construction material, for example, is an ancient practice in Mediterranean Europe, once extensive and widespread from the Balkans and possibly Turkey to southwestern Spain and

southern Portugal (Harrison 1996:363-367) and now in decline. In southwestern Spain, palynological investigations have shown that this practice may date back to Neolithic times (ie, from the early 4th millennium BCE). *Dehesas* have been defined as 'distinctive plant communities managed by man ... where animals are used to harvest the crops and convert them into dung, flesh and labour' (Harrison 1996:364). They have, unfortunately, largely been ignored as sources for archaeologists working on agricultural systems and their related social structures. Evergreen holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) fruit from the age of 10-12 years and may remain productive for 300 years and produce 600-700kg of sweet acorns per hectare annually, which are consumed by pigs, ultimately producing 60-70kg of pork/ha (Harrison 1996:364-365). The *dehesa* system of production is particularly suited to the vagaries of the Mediterranean climate and is able to withstand frequent droughts and soils prone to erosion when denuded of cover. Oaks also enrich the pasture in their immediate vicinity and improve the soil structure, since their root systems bring subsoil nutrients closer to the surface. In addition, oak groves are fairly resistant to defoliating parasites and diseases. In Harrison's opinion (1996:366): 'From the pastoralists' point of view, a *dehesa* conferred far more benefits than cereal farming or irrigation agriculture.'

While it is highly unlikely that the settlers in the hill country of Palestine farmed with pigs (pig bones being extremely rare or completely absent from the highland villages (see 5.4); unless, of course, they were raising pigs in order to trade with the Philistines!), it should be noted that acorns are an excellent food source for both humans and domestic animals, birds and wildlife, especially during times of drought. As has already been pointed out, oak woodlands are known to be able to survive such conditions. Not only are acorns highly nutritious, they also yield an oil which is comparable in quality and flavour to olive oil and they were once a staple food in Europe, Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and North America. Analysis of 11 species of Californian acorns has shown that they contain an average of 4.0% protein, 9.0% fat and 52.5% carbohydrate; they are also a good source of some vitamins, especially A and C, essential amino acids, and trace elements. Some acorns (eg, those from *Quercus ilex* var *ballota*) may be eaten raw without further treatment; others require to be leached with water

(preferably hot) to remove the bitter tannins.[33] Leaching is able to reduce the tannin level from 9.0 % to just below 0.2%, without the loss of essential amino acids; hot water does, however, remove some of the desirable fats (Bainbridge 1986).

Acorn flour can be used to make quite palatable breads,[34] while the nuts may be used as substitutes for chick-peas and roasted acorns have been used to make a coffee-like substitute (cf the *Eichel kaffee* used during World War II). Acorn oil is prepared by boiling, crushing or pressing - some varieties of oak contain more than 30% oil - and has been used as a cooking oil in Algeria and Morocco. The residue (although not as good as whole acorns), as well as oak leaves can be used as an animal feed; they are relished, for example, by cattle and sheep. Some bitter acorns and leaves can, however, cause tannin-poisoning in livestock if used as the primary source of food. Oaks are associated with succulent edible fungi and oak woodlands provide a home for wild animals (also sources of food) such as deer, rabbits and doves (Bainbridge 1986; Harrison 1996:365-366).

## 5.6 THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON THE GENESIS OF MONOTHEISM

The effects of climate and environment on Israelite society have long been overlooked or simply relegated to mere background, if considered at all. As has been pointed out, there are a number of wide-ranging observations on natural phenomena in descriptions of plants and animals in the Hebrew Bible and it would appear that its writers were generally intimately familiar with their surroundings. Thus it would seem to be totally appropriate that Daniel Hillel, an environmental scientist and ecologist, has recently (2006) demonstrated the profound effect that the environment played in shaping the society and culture of ancient Israel. He acknowledges that 'not all is determined by the environment, but much is influenced by it'

33 A tannic acid solution may be used for tanning animal hides; it also has antiviral and antiseptic properties and has been used as a gargle for sore throats, taken as a mild tea for diarrhoea and used externally on haemorrhoids (see, eg, http://www.jackmnt.com/acornbread.html).

34 Even today, acorn flour is used for making a variety of breads and porridges in such diverse places as North America and Southern Africa, based on Native American or traditional South African recipes (see, eg, http://www.jackmnt.com/acornbread.html; http://www.celtnet.org.uk/recipes/ancient/fetch-recipe.php?rid=acorn-hazlenut-pap or http://www.celtnet.org.uk/recipes/miscellaneous/fetch-recipe.php?rid=misc-acorn-pan-bread).

(2006:25). Following the broad outlines of biblical history he discusses each of the different physical environments experienced by the people who became Israelites and eventually Jews: the riverine domain (the influence of Mesopotamia and the sojourn and slavery in Egypt); the pastoral domain (the legacy of the Bedouin Patriarchs); the desert domain (the wanderings in the Sinai and Negev); the rain-fed (ie, unirrigated) domain (the settlement in the hill country of Palestine); the maritime domain (interactions with the Philistines and Phoenicians); and, finally, the two urban domains (convergence of king and cult in Jerusalem and the expulsion, survival, revival and return after the exile). In each of these domains, human adaptations resulted in specific lifestyles (eg, undertaking, for the first time, the demands of rain-fed agriculture in the central hill country) and the reader is able to gain a better understanding of the human decisions and behaviours conditioned by marginal and uncertain rainfall, high temperatures, floods, farming on rocky terraces, and a variety of other environmentally created experiences which impacted on the lives of the Israelites.

Hillel's main goal, however, is to locate the actual genesis of monotheism. In the ancient Near East, there was no fundamental scientific knowledge regarding climatic processes (eg, the El Niño-La Niña cycles). Favourable or unfavourable weather was blamed on the gods of the particular domain and was the result of either divine approval or disapproval. Acts that pleased the gods (eg, sacrifice, prayer and other rituals) were thought to be able to elicit more favourable conditions; unfavourable conditions (eg, floods, droughts and diseases), on the other hand, were thought to be due to human actions which had caused the disapproval of the gods. As Hillel (2006:36) so succinctly puts it: 'In the absence of physics, they turned to faith.' The different groups of people (eg, the Edomites, the Moabites, etc) tended to remain in one specific environmental domain; the Israelites, however, were impelled by a variety of circumstances to experience a number of different environmental settings. 'A necessary condition for the advent of monotheism was a realization that all natural phenomena - hence all the gods presumed to control them - were, in reality, manifestations of the overarching unity of nature and therefore of nature's creator' - an insight which seems to have occurred to the Israelites before any other group. They had been exposed to a variety of environments, cultures and religions in the different domains of the ancient Near East, leading to the relatively early realisation that the same God controlled the weather and other natural phenomena irrespective of where one lived (Hillel 2006:35).

This was, however, just one step on the tortuous path to pure monotheism. What followed was, firstly, the belief in a principal god, with a number of lesser gods who played subservient roles (henotheism); this was followed by the exclusive worship of one god amongst the many (monolatry), and then by the belief in the one God, associated with one nation (tribal monotheism) - a process which eventually culminated in the identification of 'God with the abstract concepts of universal morality and justice' (Hillel 2006:16).

Tying the whole explanation to the historical narrative as presented in the Hebrew Bible - the historical accuracy of which has come under intense scrutiny in the past two decades (in the absence of outside documentary or archaeological evidence) - could be considered questionable. Nevertheless, I feel that Hillel's use of a long ignored dimension - the environment - to give fresh insight into the rise of monotheism is persuasive and worth considering. Biblical Archaeology has, after all, become a multi-disciplinary field.

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

Paleoclimatic, textual and nontextual evidence from the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age has shown that Palestine (as well as much of the rest of the ancient Near East) experienced a significant climatic shift, which began in the late 13$^{th}$ century and lasted until about 900 BCE. It is quite feasible that this period of increasing aridity could have been one of the motivating factors for the movement of people from the coastal region to the central hill country. And, even if the settlers did not originate from the coastal plain, but as Rainey (2008a) believes, from east of the Jordan, a prolonged period of aridity is still likely to have caused the movement of people to the cooler and wetter hill country of Palestine.

It is also quite obvious that a move from the lowlands of Canaan into the central hill country during a period of increasing aridity would have been beneficial in terms of the availability of increased precipitation, the abundance of springs, the good grazing land, the natural defences, the abundance of edible wild plants - not to mention, the independence of the settlers from the vulnerable, centralised food supplies of the lowlands.

From the evidence presented above (Chapter 4), it would appear that Canaanite religion

persisted during Iron Age I. The persistence of the fertility cult is unsurprising, especially during a period of climatic warming. The Ugaritic texts (in particular, the Ba'al cycle) make it clear that this religion had to do with the necessities of life, the crops and food on which survival depended. What would have been more surprising is if the settlers had not worshipped fertility gods/goddesses, since they depended on agriculture for survival. Although the number and types of figurines declined in the early Iron Age, when compared to their ubiquity in the Late Bronze Age, it is worth noting that mould-made figurines (cf those produced by the mould found at Ta'anach; 10th century BCE) began to reappear at Israelite sites, especially in Judah, with increasing frequency during the 9th century, reaching a peak during the late 8th and 7th centuries, followed by a decline in the 6th century BCE (Zevit 2001:271). If these pillar-based figurines were indeed fertility figurines, then their appearance may be linked - as a kind of 'after the fact' reaction - to the climatic shift between about 1200 and 900 BCE. Initially, the effects of the notable warming in Palestine would probably not have been viewed as either serious or of possible long term duration - the climate in Palestine being notorious for its vicissitudes - so the necessity for 'Mother goddess' figurines would not have been considered a matter of urgency. However, as the period of warming and diminished precipitation proceeded, the old Canaanite practice is likely to have dominated and lasted well after the climate had begun to ameliorate; these figurines were obviously 'working,' after all. Trade had picked up and there was more opportunity to obtain fertility figurines or, at least, more time create them.

A sensitive relationship exists between society and environment. How human populations thrive or suffer depends on the social impact of local habitats and a climate deterioration undoubtedly would have had a significant effect. Until recently, the importance of the influence of the physical environment, including the role of climate fluctuations, on the history of a given region has been largely ignored. No doubt, this aspect will be increasingly recognised in the future. The effects of climate shifts should not, however, be viewed in isolation; climate should always 'be viewed in light of and in conjunction with many other factors' (Coote & Whitelam 1987:54).

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

The discussion above deals with two issues: the religious practices of the settlers in the central highlands of Palestine and the effects of a fairly dramatic climatic shift on the change in settlement patterns, during Iron Age I (ca 1200-1000 BCE). Although set in the pre-monarchic period, both topics - religion and climate - are extremely current.

How is this information able to assist with the question: *where* did the majority of the settlers come from and *why* did they move? In order to attempt to answer the '*where*' part of the question, the religious practices of the settlers have been used as an 'ethnic marker,' while the climatic conditions prevalent in Palestine during Iron Age I have been used as a possible motivating factor for the movement of people into the hill country during this period. Should the majority of the settlers have been drawn from the indigenous population of Canaan, the actual religious practices of the central hill country settlers should reflect continuity with, and should be practically indistinguishable from, the Late Bronze Age Canaanite cult. Since the Canaanite religious practices were intrinsically related to nature and fertility, a notably warmer and an increasingly and significantly drier climate would have favoured their retention.

## 6.1 DID THE CANAANITE LATE BRONZE AGE CULT PERSIST IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF PALESTINE DURING THE $12^{TH}$ - $10^{TH}$ CENTURIES BCE?

### 6.1.1 The Canaanite Late Bronze Age cult

Archaeological evidence, as well as the Ugaritic texts, point to the predominance of a 'fertility cult' in Late Bronze Age Canaan. That cult and ritual were intrinsically related to nature is totally appropriate for a marginal-zone society with an agriculturally-based economy. Late Bronze temples and their contents reflect a direct continuity with the earlier Middle Bronze

Age culture of Syria-Palestine. The Canaanite temples in Palestine had low front and side benches and altars; cult objects included *massebot*, incense altars, votive vessels, glass pendants, cylinder seals and beads. Temple worship appears to have been individual, simple and private involving little ritual other than the presentation of gifts. These gifts included votive offerings of food and drink, as well as animal sacrifice which was the *sine qua non* of the cult. There is no archaeological evidence for many of the temple practices suggested by the Ugaritic texts (eg, public celebrations, banquets, music, 'cult drama' recitations and sacred prostitutes). Large-scale public worship, in any case, would have been impossible in the small, simply designed temples. Temples were not necessarily devoted exclusively to one god; some contained a single dias (pedestal), others had two or three. It is also unclear whether different deities had different temples or whether all could be worshipped at the same temple. Although more than 200 gods are mentioned, the identities of those worshipped is anything but clear. Only a few images of the gods have survived; there is, however, some evidence for El, Ba'al, Asherah, Astarte, 'Anat and 'Mekal.' Votives were made and probably offered for sale at cult sites. A tradition of individual worship may account for the ubiquity of Late Bronze female figurines, which were perhaps worshipped in unrecognised domestic shrines.

The Ugaritic texts point to a vibrant cult of the dead; a fact which is confirmed by the existence of funeral vaults under many of the Late Bronze houses at Ras Shamra, equipped with apertures/pipes leading from ground level down into the tomb, enabling libations to be made.[35] In addition, there are several similarities between the religious practices and funeral customs depicted in the Hebrew Bible (both 'official' and those condemned) and the Ugaritic texts (see 3.3.4). As Dever (1987:228) has pointed out, a reinterpretation of the tomb deposits as symbolic votives to the gods, or as food offerings for the dead may be a fruitful avenue for future research; in addition, the actual style of tomb architecture may suggest conceptions of

35 It has recently come to my attention, that Schaeffer's interpretation of the apertures (eg, the ceiling holes covered with capstones) in Ugaritic family tombs (see 3.3.7.2) as funerary installations for the provision of water and/or food, by the living for the dead from outside the tomb, has been questioned by some scholars. Pitard (1994:34), for example, sees these as 'mundane items, unrelated to the cult of the dead' and he sees the hole in the apex of the Tomb L vault, covered by a capstone, as 'almost certainly the work of plunderers' and not 'an intentional part of the construction of the tomb' (1994:32). In addition, he has suggested that: 'Re-assessment of Schaeffer's postulated funerary cult at Ugarit should also lead to a reevaluation of the evidence adduced for post-funeral offerings to the dead in ancient Israel' (1994:35).

life after death.

Canaanite religion and, in particular, the cult of Asherah, appears to have persisted well into the Common Era.

### 6.1.2 The religious practices of the settlers in the central highlands of Palestine during the early settlement period: the archaeological evidence

There is very little clear evidence of Israelite religion and cult prior to the Monarchy in the 10th and 9th centuries BCE. As has been mentioned, Yahwism, with all its attendant institutions was, no doubt, a product of a later period. The somewhat meagre, eclectic group of cult sites discovered, to date, represents the type of diversity one would expect from an amalgam of disparate tribal groups involved in a slow and uneven settlement and unification process. The small open-air sanctuaries and cult rooms appear to reflect the religious needs of a simple agrarian, non-urban society that required no elaborate religious rituals and, presumably, religion was practised differently at home, village, sanctuary and extra-urban sanctuary. Those from the time of the United Monarchy (10th century BCE) show an increasing degree of uniformity with respect to architecture, cultic objects and choice of locations. Unfortunately, none of them provide any clear archaeological evidence as to the deity/deities being worshipped, although it would appear that one of these deities was Asherah. In common with Late Bronze Age practices, several of the sanctuaries and shrines feature *massebot*, altars, offering stands, model shrines, figurines and facilities for the production of cultic commodities such as offering vessels, figurines and olive oil.

The ideas concerning death and the afterlife, as well as the funeral rites practised by the settlers, also appear to closely approximate those of the Canaanites. At Dothan, for example (see 4.9.1), Chamber Tomb 1 was used continuously throughout Late Bronze II and Iron I, without any significant break in funerary ideology during the transition. Both the Ugaritic texts and the archaeological evidence from Ras Shamra confirm that the living (the descendants of the dead) were needed to provide the necessities that were impossible to provide in the afterlife. In order to keep the memory of the deceased alive and establish a solidarity between the dead and the living, the dead were given proper burials in family tombs

and provided with simple funereal equipment; in return, the dead were expected to exercise a positive and benevolent influence on the living, thereby assuring the survival of human society. The anticipated result of the rites of pouring out libations and making offerings to the dead was to assure the well-being of the living. 'Without the second component, the first is religiously meaningless, a ritual without cultic significance' (Ackerman 1992:148). The dead have a crucial interest in the fertility of the family, as well as that of the land. Should the family line be discontinued, the deceased would no longer be provided for. In addition, the family land would be lost, 'leaving the deceased ancestors homeless' (Ackerman 1992:160).

What is surprising, however, is the decline in the number of fertility figurines, coupled with the lack of temples, during the early Iron Age, when compared to their ubiquity in the Late Bronze Age. Mould-made, pillar-base figurines, however, began to reappear at Israelite sites, especially in Judah, with increasing frequency during the 9$^{th}$ century, reaching a peak during the late 8$^{th}$ and the 7$^{th}$ centuries, followed by a decline in the 6$^{th}$ century BCE (Zevit 2001:271). In my opinion, as the period of aridity progressed, the settlers probably felt an increasing need to enlist the aid of the fertility goddess. If these were indeed fertility figurines, then their appearance may be linked - as a kind of 'after the fact' reaction - to the climatic shift between about 1200 and 900 BCE. Initially, the effects of the notable warming in Palestine would probably not have been viewed as either serious or of possible long term duration - the climate in Palestine being notorious for its vicissitudes - so the necessity for 'Mother goddess' figurines would not have been considered a matter of urgency. However, as the period of warming and diminished precipitation proceeded, the old Canaanite practice is likely to have been resuscitated. The fact that it lasted well after the climate had begun to ameliorate is unsurprising; these figurines were obviously 'working,' after all. And, perhaps, it may be suggested that, with today's global warming, it may be worth investing in a few 'Mother goddess' figurines, ourselves!

Since most of these figurines were found broken - apparently deliberately - it would appear that they 'were intended for single use, one prayer or one ritual - one charge of spiritual power' (Zevit 2001:272). Presumably, they were intended for private, individual cultic use, perhaps as invocations to Asherah and not for public or communal acts. Coogan (1987b:120) has suggested that 'that the more private elements of Canaanite religion were less susceptible to change than those of a public, quasi-official character, for it is precisely in many such

elements that we find the least variation despite wide separation in time and space.' Regarding the lack of early Iron Age temples, this may simply have been due to the fact that the hill country settlers were too preoccupied with the settlement process to have actually had the time to build them.

All of the early religious practices/features are well known from Late Bronze Age Canaan. The only innovation would appear to be the Israelite small, four-horned altars (from the 10th century BCE onwards). The prophetic denunciations and Deuteronomistic reforms directed at syncretistic cults - including those devoted to Ba'al and Asherah - would seem to suggest that Canaanite religion persisted and was a component of Israelite life, at least until the end of the Iron Age. Susan Ackerman, in *Under every green tree: popular religion in sixth-century Judah* (1992) has, in fact, clearly demonstrated that even as late as the end of the 7th century and during the first part of the 6th century BCE, Judahites of all classes of society were worshipping not only Yahweh, but other deities such as Asherah. In addition, they were worshipping Yahweh in a number of ways that were condemned by the 'theologians' who wrote the Hebrew Bible. In her words: 'Yahwism was characterised by a diversity which extends far beyond the parameters seemingly established by the biblical text' (1992:215).

Not all scholars agree that early Israel was polytheistic. Tigay (1986), for example, has investigated the prevalence of polytheism in early Israel, using Hebrew theophoric personal names (mainly from the 8th century BCE and excluding those with the ambiguous elements *'el* (God/god/the deity El) and *'eli* (my god)) which appear on more than 1200 seals and ostraca, as well as those mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, for evidence of religious belief. The ratio of Yahwistic names to pagan names is 94.1% to 5.9% in the inscriptions (of a total of 592 individuals ) and 89% to 11% for all pre-exilic periods represented in the Hebrew Bible (of a total of 466; Tigay 1986:17-18). He concludes that the proportion of Yahwistic to polytheistic adherents in the Israelite-Judean population was probably fairly similar and that the polemics by the biblical writers were simply an 'exaggeration' (1986:40). He is willing to concede, however, that there may have been 'some superficial, fetishistic polytheism and a limited amount of more profound polytheism in Israel' (1986:40). Nevertheless, from the evidence presented above, it would appear that Canaanite religion did, in fact, persist. I am thus of the opinion that the religion of the hill country settlers was, in fact, polytheistic.

The persistence of the fertility cult is unsurprising, especially during a period of climatic

warming. The Ugaritic texts (in particular, the Ba'al cycle) make it clear that this religion had to do with the necessities of life, the crops and food on which survival depended. Ba'al's antagonist is Mot (the divine personification of death, drought and sterility), whose home appropriately is the underworld. As mentioned earlier, the Ba'al texts describe, in broad terms, the tension between fertility and sterility and thus reflect the climatic conditions. The summer in Syria and Palestine, 'if not actually a season of sterility, ... is nevertheless a season of tension' (Gray1965:12). If the spring rain (the 'latter rains' of the Hebrew Bible) is either too scanty or arrives too late, the dry season may arrive before the seedlings have grown and matured sufficiently. Should the final rain be too early or too late, the crop yield is likely to be limited.

What would have been more surprising is if the settlers had not worshipped fertility gods/goddesses, since they depended on agriculture for survival. 'Nothing in ancient Israel was more fundamental, more urgent, than the continued fertility of humans and beasts and the fields' (Dever 2005:271). I was surprised to note, however, that the owners of the ubiquitous pillar-base figurines apparently did not give their children names such as the Phoenician *'m'shtrt* ('Ashtoreth is his/her mother'); in addition, it would appear that they neither invoked the blessings of a goddess nor made offerings to her. Tigay (1986:92) thus concludes that they 'are not likely to have worshipped fertility goddesses.' He sees them not as goddesses, but rather as Pritchard (1943) viewed them, that is, as talismans 'used in sympathetic magic to stimulate the reproductive processes' (cf Van der Toorn 1994:91).

There appears to have been hardly any notion of monotheism during the pre-monarchic period, when 'every man did what was right in his own eyes' (Jdg 21:25). It would appear that during the early settlement period, 'folk religion was still very close to its roots, sunk deep in the soil of traditional Bronze Age Canaan' (Dever 2005:271) - a fact which would appear to confirm that the majority of the settlers were, indeed Canaanites. Whether these Canaanites were from the coastal city-states of Palestine or from elsewhere, however, remains inconclusive.

Others from elsewhere in the ancient Near East may also have joined the Canaanite settlers. For example, since the Zebu bull is not native to ancient Palestine and the bull figurine from the 'Bull Site' (see 4.6.2) is stylistically of northern provenance, Ahlström (1990:77-79) has argued that the settlers probably included an intrusive, non-Canaanite group of northerners, in

addition to indigenous people. Van der Steen (1996:67), on the other hand, is of the opinion that although the Mt. Ebal site (see 4.6.3) is not identifiable as being associated with any specific religion or ethnic group, the 'morphotypology' of the pottery would seem to confirm that 'some of the new settlements, like Mt. Ebal and possibly the Bull Site, may have had their origins in migration of people from east of the Jordan' (1996:68). After all, the comprehensive synthesis of archaeological surveys by Finkelstein (1988) has shown that the majority of the new settlements appear to have started in the east and then, only gradually, moved to the west. There are indications that Hittites (after the disintegration and collapse of the Hittite empire), as well as groups of 'Sea Peoples' settled in Palestine and some of these may have settled in the central highlands. In addition, according to biblical traditions, Aramaeans may also have settled in Cisjordan (the patriarch Jacob, for example, although closely connected to the territory of Ephraim, is in the narratives associated with Aram (Gn 28:10-31:55) and is characterized as 'a wandering Aramaean' in the confessional statement in Dt 26:5).

The Hebrew Bible makes it clear that the official state religion of Israel was the worship of Yahweh which, from the days of Solomon, was centred at the Jerusalem Temple - a fact which could lead one to assume that Syro-Palestinian religion consisted of two strands: Canaanite religion, on the one hand, and Israelite religion, on the other. Van der Toorn (1995:2043) rejects such a dichotomy out of hand. In the Hebrew Bible, all non-Yahwistic practices were labelled by the Israelite establishment as 'Canaanite' and were condemned as being the opposite of Yahwism, while the latter was retrospectively presented as the original religion of the Israelites. 'Thus conceived, however, both Canaanite and Israelite religions are figments of the imagination' (1995:2043). It is obviously incorrect to assume that the religion of the Iron I settlers in the highlands of Palestine was pure, monotheistic 'Yahwism'. From the evidence presented, it would appear that the veneration of Asherah and other gods was widespread. All this was most probably part of the 'religion of Israel.' The difference between 'official' and 'folk/cult religion' is one of status: 'official religion enjoys prestige, folk religion, popularity' - a difference which has a 'socio-historical background' (Van der Toorn 1994:112). The 'official' portrait of ancient Israelite religion is incomplete, highly idealistic (not to mention, distorted) and reflects to a large degree the views of the elite, orthodox, nationalistic sects and parties that produced it (Van der Toorn 1994:37; Dever 2001:270). They saw polytheism as a lapse from an original, pure Mosaic monotheism; however, their

condemnation of 'pagan' beliefs and rites simultaneously confirms their widespread existence. In other words, as has been pointed out, the religion depicted in the Hebrew Bible is what *should/ought* to have been believed by the Israelites and it was produced relatively late in Israel's history. Folk/cult religion, on the other hand, was most probably the *real* religion of the Israelites (ie, what the majority of people in fact believed and practised, whether mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or not; Dever 2001:270).

Monotheism was, in fact, a long, hard-fought struggle that only fully triumphed after the destruction of Israel and Judah and the experience of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE and, perhaps, should be viewed as 'the radical response to a foreign culture that threatened to submerge the identity of the Israelites' (Van der Toorn 1995:2057) and as 'an attempt to forge a *new* identity and destiny for a people who otherwise would have been left without hope' (Dever 2005:297).

A fascinating aspect of this study has been the revelation that there is an obvious similarity between the customs of the Late Bronze Age Canaanites, the Iron I settlers in the highlands of Palestine and those of certain African cultures. Customs in common include: the duty of children to care for their parents; land possession being dependent upon the correct behaviour towards one's ancestors; and even the erection of *massebot* as aniconic representations of the deity. Obviously, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*! ('The more things change, the more they stay the same').

## 6.2 CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

The evidence presented would seem to confirm that a climatic shift, which began at the end the Late Bronze Age and lasted throughout Iron Age I, occurred in Palestine (as well as much of the ancient Near East) and it is quite possible that this climatic shift was one of the motivating factors for the movement of people to the central highlands. Following a few centuries of comparatively cool weather from about 1500 to 1200 BCE, favourable (on the average) for increased precipitation, historical climatology studies, as well as nontextual and textual evidence, have strongly suggested that from about 1200 to about 900 BCE, the Near East became notably warmer and increasingly and significantly drier. Such a situation would

have contributed to the destabilisation of life in the lowland city-states and the change in settlement patterns in Iron Age I. Even if the settlers in the central hill country of Palestine did not originate from the coastal plain, a prolonged period of aridity is still likely to have caused the movement of people (eg, local pastoral nomads or people from Transjordan) to the hill country.

The benefits of such a move include the increased precipitation in the coastal ranges when compared to the lowlands, even during times of drought, the abundance of springs in the larger valleys, as well as the provision of some of the best grazing land in the area. In addition, the thicker vegetation and the natural rock defences provided by the terrain would have provided the settlers with added protection from the city-states should this have been necessary. The settlers would no longer have been dependent on the large-scale agriculture and vulnerable central food supplies of the lowlands and they would have been able to provide their own via alternative means of food production. The hill country woodlands would also have been an excellent source of edible wild plants and acorns.

As Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:117) have pointed out: 'In the Middle East, people have always had the know-how to rapidly change from village life to animal husbandry - or back from pastoralism to settled agriculture - according to evolving political, economic, or even climate conditions.' The central hill country had only been very sparsely settled during the Late Bronze Age - a situation which changed dramatically in Iron IA, due to the appearance of hundreds of new, small sedentary sites. It should be pointed out, however, that although the central hill country has now been extensively surveyed, the coastal area of Palestine has not been surveyed to the same extent; it is thus 'simply not possible to make comparisons between some, often very important subregions' (Whitelam 1996:183). It was postulated that most of the settlers in the hill country of Palestine, during the pre-monarchic period, were probably Canaanites and the archaeological evidence presented would appear to confirm that this was indeed so. It is apparent that the settlers were neither warriors, nor outsiders. They left few weapons and most of the villages were unfortified and lacked monumental buildings (with the exception of Giloh). It would seem clear that their early struggles were not against other peoples, but rather with the stony and forested terrain and the environment. They were farmers and herders and their material remains would seem to confirm that they came from inside Palestine.

Whilst the various individual components of the material culture found at these new sites are firmly rooted in Late Bronze Age Canaan, the cultural assemblage as a whole - the size and layout of the sites, the four-roomed house, the fact that only a few of the available artifacts were actually selected for use, and the paucity of painted pottery and imported objects - is unparalleled in the Late Bronze Age. There is also no evidence for a similar 'peasant' society in Late Bronze Canaan, with most towns lacking neighbouring 'peasant' villages. Nevertheless, it remains possible that following the destruction, abandonment or decline of the lowland Canaanite city-states, some of the population may have moved to the interior and the hill country, taking their traditions with them. At the same time, it is also possible that the settlers may have originated in pastoral groups from the fringes of Canaan, who had been exposed to the indigenous Canaanite culture. 'Such people would not have brought with them any outstanding material culture of their own during the settlement process' and would simply have selected whichever existing Canaanite components they deemed useful for a sedentary lifestyle (Mazar 1990a:94). In my opinion, however, the majority of the settlers in the highlands of Palestine during Iron Age I most probably came from the Canaanite coastal city-states.

Until recently, the importance of the influence of the physical environment, including the role of climatic shifts, on the history of a given region has been largely ignored. No doubt, this aspect will be increasingly recognised and researched in the future.

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BA | Biblical Archaeologist |
| BAR | Biblical Archaeology Review |
| BASOR | Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research |
| IEJ | Israel Exploration Journal |
| JAOS | Journal of the American Oriental Society |
| JBL | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| JNES | Journal of Near Eastern Studies |
| PEQ | Palestine Exploration Quarterly |

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