

Part I

# Methodology: Questions, Concepts, Approaches, and Tools

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# A

# Contextualizing Israelite Culture



## CHAPTER 1

# Archaeology

## What It Can Teach Us

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Archaeological remains and biblical texts constitute independent witnesses to Israelite society. Physical remains offer extensive evidence for reconstructing “ancient Israel”; biblical texts form the basis for the literary construct “biblical Israel.” Typically, information derived from the two is harmonized to reconstruct the ancient society. However, studying the data sets independently reveals discrepancies between the two, prompting renewed study of both.

Physical remains are inclusive, generally not manipulated by subsequent peoples, and immeasurably greater in scope than literary accounts. In contrast to texts, which are limited by religious and royal perspectives and agendas, material remains are generated by diverse human groups including rich and poor, males and females, adults and children, and urban and rural populations. These physical manifestations of society, labeled “material culture,” enable reconstructing ancient Israelite society from the smallest constituent parts, phytoliths and pots, to integrated cultural systems (e.g., politics, religion and economy). Aspects of life such as daily work routines, the economic system, aesthetics, burial practices, tools and weapons, diet and health, while not the focus of biblical texts, are amply illustrated in the archaeological record.

Material remains permit absolute and relative dating, from specific features to general historical contexts. Unlike texts, for which dating remains a contentious issue, archaeology enables both synchronic and diachronic study of ancient Israel. Changes and developments in Israel including religious practices, which are a focus of the biblical text, are blurred by textual additions and revisions but remain distinct and differentiable in material remains. Archaeological studies enable biblicalists to situate biblical Israel within the context of ancient Israel, to hear conversations and pronouncements of biblical authors and editors in their historical contexts.

Archaeology also suggests the period in which a text might have originated, if one accepts that the initial composition of a text derives meaning from historical reality. An

argument for the importance of verisimilitude posits that texts written to convey Israel's history initially derived greater impact from known historical referents. By analogy, a text, either historical or satirical, set in the context of the Soviet-American Cold War would resonate for older Americans in a way that it does not for those now under 25. In today's American movies, the enemy is no longer a Soviet spy.

## Introduction to Archaeological Methods of Excavation and Interpretation

Archaeology studies the lives and cultures of peoples of the past through retrieval and analysis of physical remains, in conjunction with written testimony, and in interaction with the natural environment. The process begins with a research agenda that determines where to survey and/or dig and the selection of excavation methods. For excavation, as opposed to survey, diachronic goals require smaller excavation areas dug down through multiple occupational phases, while synchronic goals necessitate greater horizontal exposure within a single occupational phase. Interest in detail, now down to the microscopic, forces a slow pace, while an interest in the "big picture" mandates faster excavation for the representative features. Most excavations pursue a combination of diachronic and synchronic goals, with different excavation methods for separate excavation areas. For ancient Israel, comparable to other ancient cultures, archaeological studies focus on single periods (synchronic) as well as developments over time (diachronic), on both the micro and the macro level.

Interpretation of the finds, undertaken both in the course of excavation and subsequently, constitutes the second step. The interpretive process, determining the specific use or function and symbolic value of material remains and architecture, entails several facets. To begin with, the archaeologist defines the research unit or context, such as a house/structure, the settlement, or the region. Archaeologists then look for patterned behavior within the defined unit, a repeating web of relationships among individual elements that establishes a general context and the place and meaning of specific items within that context. For example, a particular pot type that typically appears in a basement room of a house or the hold of a ship functions for storage or for transport. On a higher level of complexity, patterned behavior facilitates reconstructing regional practices or cultural systems (economic, political, social and religious).

A particular ornate column capital employed in elaborate buildings by nation-states both east and west of the Jordan River exemplifies a patterned behavior that conveys political meaning. The distinctively decorated capital signals internationally recognized elite status, probably royalty. At each level of complexity, from the individual item to the cultural system, the interpretation must account for both the range of available material remains and literary evidence.

Interpretation entails consideration of other ancient regional cultures, ancient texts and inscriptions, and ethnographic studies of comparable societies, keeping in mind that the comparative material derives from different cultural contexts. For ancient Israel, studies of contemporary, traditional Cypriot potters elucidate aspects of ancient pottery production. Our understanding of the biblical goddesses Asherah and Astarte draws on

Ugaritic and Phoenician evidence; the Bible refers to them but omits details. Whereas archaeology provides the physical remains, texts and inscriptions add mental components – beliefs and thoughts – as well as otherwise unattainable information such as people’s names and specific dates of events. Other ancient cultures and ethnographic studies offer alternative societal models, which may be helpful in evaluating Israelite evidence.

Finally, interpretation benefits from studying the natural world with its resources and constraints such as topography, geology, climate, flora, fauna and water sources. Roads, water availability, and native plants and animals directly affect and determine societal aspects such as settlement location, subsistence strategies, and beliefs and practices stemming from human interaction with the natural environment. Israel’s location of sacred sites on elevated ground, purification rituals, sacrificial offerings and the timing and offerings of agricultural and herding festivals exemplify religious features dependent on natural factors.

The archaeological endeavor – excavation and interpretation – is not without limitations. Some limitations stem from the paucity of available evidence. For example, the relatively poorly attested Late Bronze Age and Persian period, preceding and following the Israelite kingdoms of the Iron Age, are less well known than periods with more extensive remains. The small percentage of existent sites that have been excavated and published provide an incomplete, but hopefully representative, picture. The tendency to focus on tells – cities, towns, forts – leaves villages, hamlets, farmsteads and isolated activity areas less well represented and understood. Absolute dating, establishing specific years, persists as an archaeological Achilles’ heel. Artifact and epigraphic typologies, datable items such as a royal scarab, and scientific methods such as <sup>14</sup>C (carbon fourteen) dating currently provide a time frame but cannot pinpoint a year or even a decade. Archaeologists largely depend on texts for absolute dates. Sennacherib’s inscribed and graphic depiction on the Nineveh palace walls of conquering the site of Lachish in 701 BCE correlates with and dates the Lachish Stratum III destruction. However, most of the time, no such explicit correspondence exists between material remains and texts or inscriptions.

The interpretive process further complicates reconstructing Israelite society. First, archaeological remains must be patterned to allow for interpretation, which necessitates multiple occurrences to detect a pattern. The obvious limitation of this interpretive strategy is that it elucidates a general pattern that marginalizes variation and unique occurrences. We reconstruct group but not individual or small-group behaviors. Second, for all our efforts at objectivity, interpretation remains a subjective endeavor colored by a mindset shaped by contemporary culture. For example, our form of government, whether a tribal-based society, a monarchy, or a democracy, may prejudice our understanding and reconstruction of ancient societies and their political structures. Third, vague terminology and inexplicit weighting of physical remains and literary evidence in the interpretive process complicate societal reconstructions. What is the reconstructed entity Merneptah’s “Israel” (see below): archaeologically attested “ancient Israel”; “biblical Israel” as a national entity; “biblical Israel” as a religious ethnos; or a harmonized biblical-archaeological Israel, either national or religious? This shortcoming may be remedied through explicit methodological statements and explication of terminology employed.

## “Biblical Israel” of the Text and “Ancient Israel” of the Archaeological Remains

A difference of opinion exists among archaeologists regarding the role of Israel in the southern Levant. Characterizing the two extremes, ethnocentric Biblical Archaeologists consider Israel as central and unique, while Syro-Palestinian Archaeologists view Israel as one of several regional kingdoms. The former stress the uniqueness of ancient Israel and rely heavily on the Bible as history to bolster their position. This approach stems from biblical archaeology of the 1950s (a cultural-historical approach), in which the canonical text had primacy of place and archaeology served to elucidate and verify the Bible. For the latter, Syro-Palestinian Archaeologists, the Bible constitutes a critically important cultural artifact that enhances understanding of the general culture but more specifically of those who composed, edited and transmitted the texts. This is not to minimize but to qualify use of biblical texts. Syro-Palestinian Archaeologists recognize that biblical texts and inscriptions contribute information irretrievable from material culture alone such as intangible facets of culture, beliefs and *mentalité* (e.g., ancestral stories, metaphors, myths of origins or qualifications for priesthood) plus specific information otherwise lost (e.g., tax assessments). Without texts, we might not know that Israelite society was patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrimonial. Both avenues of study, with the Bible either central or supplemental to the archaeological endeavor, contribute to the emerging picture of ancient and biblical Israel. However, the cultural presuppositions of each group, with consequent selectivity of cited data, must be kept in mind when utilizing publications and considering societal reconstructions.

The first extrabiblical reference to Israel comes from Pharaoh Merneptah's mention at the end of the thirteenth century BCE of “Israel” on a stele celebrating his conquests (for Merneptah, see also John Huddleston's essay in this volume). Accordingly, studies of early Israel begin with the Iron Age I rural settlement in the Cisjordanian highlands, the biblical Israelite heartland. Scholarly consensus dates the southern Levantine Iron Age from ca. 1200–586 BCE. The periodization essentially remains as established by William Foxwell Albright in the early twentieth century CE, though specific beginning and ending dates are debated and varying historical monikers are used.

The approximately 400-year period of the Iron Age is divided into Iron I and Iron II, with further subdivisions. Dates for the subdivisions, dependent on events in Israel's history and so insignificant for Philistines, Transjordanian nations, and the Phoenicians, reflect the history and bias of the discipline (see also J. David Schloen's essay in this volume). Current debates regarding periodization perpetuate the biblical Israelite perspective. The Iron Age traditionally begins with the eclipse of eastern Mediterranean empires ca. 1200 BCE (A. Mazar 295–6). Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman propose revising the periodization in conformance with a more ethnocentric view of history by beginning the period ca. 1150 only after the Egyptian withdrawal with the emergence of regional cultures, including Israel (16). Changing dates to focus on Israelite events obscures the general eastern Mediterranean context in which Israel plays a minor part.



Based on Merneptah's testimony, archaeological studies of ancient Israel commence with the onset of the Iron Age. Iron I begins with extensive rural settlement in the central highlands (ca. 1200/1125–1000/900 BCE). Those who accept the canonical unilinear history of biblical Israel ("traditionalists") attribute these settlements to the "conquest and settlement" generations detailed in the books of Joshua and Judges. While settlement is evident, widespread conquests dated to a single period are unattested. Iron II has been variously divided based on biblical events and archaeological remains. Iron IIA (1000/930–900/840 BCE) represents the "united monarchy" for traditionalists who begin the period around 1000 BCE and credit David and Solomon with the intensified urbanization seen in this period (the "high chronology"). Advocates of a ca. 930 BCE start for the period (the "low chronology") attribute the spur in development to the northern Omride kings, Omri and Ahab, rather than David and Solomon (see Brad Kelle's essay in this volume). Iron IIB (900/840–722 BCE), the period of "the Divided Kingdom" for traditionalists, follows Iron IIA and continues to the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians. Iron IIC (722–587/6 BCE) ends with the devastating Babylonian campaign of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of Jerusalem. Iron IIB and IIC dates are pegged to the specific years of historical events described in the Bible and noted in Assyrian and Babylonian royal annals. While debate continues over the absolute dates, archaeologists are refining our knowledge of the southern Levant by focusing on subphases within periods (e.g., Iron IA and IB), transitions and regional variations within periods.

The most basic units of our study remain elusive. Based on archaeological findings, even in conjunction with biblical testimony, self-defined members of the Israelite religious community remain indistinguishable from nonmembers (with the exception of the Philistines/Sea Peoples). Select items such as collar-rim storejars and pillared houses designated by contemporary scholars as markers of biblical Israelites lack distinctive Israelite markings and biblical mention as an ethnic marker. Furthermore, both the storejar and pillared house occur outside Israelite territory and their functional adaptation to a highland lifestyle favored use by non-Israelites as well as Israelites. Even abstinence from eating pig, an Israelite prohibition according to the Bible, characterized highland settlers of the preceding Late Bronze Age and so would not distinguish a biblical Israelite from any other highland non-Israelite predecessor or contemporary. Pig bones, indicative of human consumption, while retrieved in negligible quantities from both Bronze and Iron Age highland settlements, constitute nearly 20 percent of the faunal material from early Philistine sites situated in the coastal region and so distinguish Philistines from non-Philistines but not Israelites from "Canaanites" or other non-Israelites.

Given these limitations, is it possible to identify ancient and biblical Israelites in the archaeological record? Biblical texts regard select settlements as Israelite, including Dan on the northern border, the fortress at Lachish, and Jerusalem as the capital city of Judah. However, even within these royal and administrative settlements, houses and commercial establishments may have belonged to foreigners, including merchants and mercenaries. Unless clearly indicated to the contrary, settlements within the heartland of the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms are regarded as representative of biblical and ancient Israel even though they likely included non-Israelites.

## Reconstructing Ancient and Biblical Israel from an Archaeological Perspective

Material remains elucidate ancient cultures from the individual item to the web of elements that demonstrate systemic behaviors such as economic and religious systems. On the most basic level, physical remains illustrate specific facets of ancient life. Examples range from flint sickle blades and city gate plans to personal stamp seals found in Jerusalem of King Zedekiah's court officials, Jucal, son of Shelemiah, and Gedaliah, son of Pashhur (Jer. 37:3; 38:1; E. Mazar 67–71). Current innovative work applies scientific techniques to the retrieval and analysis of archaeological remains, often at the microscopic level. Archaeobotanists determined that grains retrieved from the 604 BCE destruction level at Ashkelon included a high admixture of weeds (25 percent) and infestation by the granary weevil. Within the historical context, the excavators interpreted these findings as indicating haste in harvesting and poor storage facilities attributed to urgent preparations in anticipation of the Babylonian attack (Weiss et al. 595–6). In another example, residue analysis of Philistine cultic chalices excavated from a pit at Yavneh showed that the vessels functioned as incense altars to burn hallucination-inducing floral substances (Namdar et al. 169–70). Archaeology has traditionally served to verify site identification but the procedure suffers from circular reasoning. Based on the biblical narrative, scholars determine the site's period(s) of occupation and then search for a settlement in the appropriate vicinity that satisfies the dating criteria.

Archaeology's value for studying ancient Israel far exceeds site identification and illustration of details. On a higher level of cultural complexity, patterned remains demonstrate cultural systems – economic, political, social, religious and symbolic/*mentalité*. For facets of society such as the economy, which are not the focus of the biblical text, archaeology provides much-needed evidence. Regarding religion, the Bible is a theological document and so generally regarded as Israel's definitive religious history. However, late Iron Age and subsequent perspectives retrojected into Israel's early history to explain the later course of events obscure or obfuscate both chronological developments and varying regional practices. Here archaeology plays a critical role as an independent witness. Datable material remains preserve actual religious practices, demonstrate chronological developments and regional variation, and provide the general historical contexts for the religious literary activity.

The Tel Arad temple exemplifies a disjunction between text and artifact; it illustrates praxis as opposed to promulgation and provides the context in which texts were written and to which they were responding. According to the Books of Kings, the late eighth- to late seventh-century BCE Judahite kings Hezekiah and Josiah tore down and defiled altars and high places to restrict worship with sacrifice to the Jerusalem temple (2 Kings 18:22; 23:5–20). However, the Bible omits mention of the royally sponsored temple with a sacrificial altar constructed within a Judahite military fort on the southern border at Arad. Seventh- to sixth-century BCE correspondence between the local commander Eliashib and his Jerusalem superior confirms both the fort's official status and Yahweh as the resident deity (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 31–74). This alternative worship site consisted

of a tripartite temple (ca. 12 × 16 meters), somewhat smaller than Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, with an elevated, focal niche housing two incense altars and one, or more likely two, standing stones (*maṣṣēbā/maṣṣēbôt*). The two incense altars, one larger than the other, enhance the likelihood of two stones displayed in the niche. The larger stone or stele stood 1 meter high, with flat faces, a rounded top, and smoothed sides retaining red paint. A second smaller stone of comparable shape was found plastered into the niche wall. In the courtyard, a large stone altar (ca. 2.5 meters square) accommodated animal sacrifices. Foundation and demise dates for the temple are debated. Construction occurred in the tenth or eighth century BCE and the *maṣṣēbā/ôt* stood through the end of the eighth or as late as the sixth century BCE (Aharoni, "Excavations"; Aharoni, "Arad"; Ussishkin 149–51). All agree the temple functioned in the eighth century BCE. The existence of this royally sanctioned border temple conforms to the practice of marking and protecting borders with temples, as illustrated by the Israelite king Jeroboam's temples at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:26–31). Depending on its dates, this temple outside of Jerusalem, in a royal fort and administrative center, suggests that Hezekiah and Josiah's alleged cultic reforms perhaps promoted royal oversight of the cult rather than exclusive worship in Jerusalem.

This temple challenges the canonical biblical picture of centralized worship of a single deity both in its very existence – an alternative, royally sponsored site of worship and sacrifice – and by the two stones standing in the niche. Some biblical passages recognize *maṣṣēbôt*/standing stones as part of the Yahwistic cult. Genesis 35:14 describes Jacob's *maṣṣēbā* at Bethel and Isaiah 19:19–20 envisions a Yahwistic *maṣṣēbā* erected on the border between Israel and Egypt. Passages in Deuteronomy that call for the smashing or otherwise eradication of *maṣṣēbôt* refer specifically to stones dedicated to foreign deities, not Yahweh (Deut. 7:5; 12:2–3). Most other passages prohibit the practice but do not identify the deity. No matter who the referent is, at some point or in some circles the practice that continued from the Bronze Age fell from favor (Lev. 26:1; Deut. 16:21–22; Mic. 5:12; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:14). Based on the Arad evidence, the stone itself may have become an object of worship and a challenge to Yahweh's exclusive residence in Jerusalem, prompting rejection of standing stones within certain segments of society.

Lacking explicit evidence naming the deities manifest in the stones, the identification of the larger and smaller stones respectively with the masculine god Yahweh and a female or lesser deity such as Asherah remains tentative and debated (Zevit 262; see further the essays by Mark Smith and Francesca Stavrakopoulou in this volume). Biblical and inscriptional testimonies associate Asherah with Yahweh and situate the goddess's symbol within Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. Even if the supreme deity Yahweh has incorporated her and her powers (Smith 48), she retains a distinctive symbol known by her name. Inscriptions from the first quarter of the eighth century BCE from the desert caravanserai site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud invoke "Yahweh and his a/Asherah," "Yahweh of Teiman and [his] a/Asherah" and "Yahweh of Shomron (Samaria) and his a/Asherah" (Meshel; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 285–97). From the last quarter of the eighth century BCE, an inscription or graffito from Khirbet el-Qom Tomb 3 also appeals to Yahweh and his a/Asherah (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 408–14). Attestations to their relationship are not restricted to extrabiblical sources. 2 Kings acknowledges A/asherah manifest in the form of a wooden pole that stood and was worshipped within the Jerusalem temple; cultic

reforms in the second half of the seventh century BCE attributed to Josiah mandated the destruction of temple objects dedicated to the goddess (2 Kings 21:7; 23:4, 6). Yahweh and A/asherah's association, as known from inscriptions and the Bible, explicitly in the Jerusalem temple, bolsters the argument for identifying the second, smaller stone in the Arad temple niche with the goddess.

Analyzing the biblical and archaeological data sets independently produces a different picture than that offered by those who advocate a composite picture. Harmonizing the evidence suggests that the Arad temple constituted royal infidelity, an abrogation of Jerusalem's cultic exclusivity. Comparable temples at the northern kingdom's border sites of Dan and Bethel were disparaged (1 Kings 12:28–30). Perhaps biblical authors omitted mention of the Arad temple in deference to the Davidic kings of Judah. Not harmonizing the two data sets yields a variant picture of this stage and of the general evolution of Yahwistic religion. Rather than viewing exclusive worship of Yahweh in the eighth- to sixth-century BCE Jerusalem temple as the norm, this temple illustrates Israelite worship, at disparate sites, of multiple deities manifest in physical forms, including standing stones. Biblical references to Israelites, including kings worshipping Baal, Asherah, the host of heaven, and the Queen of Heaven, in Jerusalem and at shrines throughout the country (2 Kings 23:4–6; Jer. 7:17–8; 44:17), suggest that Israelites of that period worshipped multiple deities. While select voices denounced polytheism as apostasy, it appears to have been common practice among the populace and royalty alike.

Might Judean pillar figurines (JPFs) also represent A/asherah? Their production began in the late tenth or ninth century BCE and ended in the early sixth century BCE, with their heyday in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (see also Francesca Stavrakopoulou's essay in this volume). The earliest examples appeared at Tel Qasile on the coast, in the Shephelah, and at northern Negev sites but soon spread into the Israelite highlands (Kletter, *Figurines*, 40–1 and Appendix 1). The crude terracotta female image stands approximately 6 inches high, with a slightly flaring pole-shaped body, a prominent bosom supported by clasped hands, and either a pinched or a molded head. Petrography indicates regional production; Jerusalem and Tel Ira JPFs utilized Jerusalem vicinity terra-rossa clay and Negev loess clay respectively (Kletter, "Between text and theology," 188). Kletter cautiously estimates "a few dozen moulds for all the JPFs [heads]" (Kletter, *Figurines*, 52; "Between text and theology," 189). The small numbers of molds, petrographic evidence, plus regional differences in pillar manufacture and head depiction attest to regionalized production in the Jerusalem area and in the Negev rather than localized or individualized manufacture (Kletter, *Figurines*, 188–9).

Whom does the figurine portray? Circular reasoning claims this is not a plaything because toys are rarely attested in the ancient world, though JPFs have been interpreted as the ancient equivalent of a Barbie/Dolly Parton doll. The lack of clothing, relatively sudden appearance and end with Jerusalem's destruction, distribution throughout Judah, and managed production with limited variability suggest the figurine represents more than just a plaything. The fact that the anthropomorphic part of the figurine is naked (jewelry and makeup are occasionally added with paint but not clothing) argues for its divine status. Mortal women wore clothing; to be exposed was a source of shame and humiliation inflicted upon the likes of prisoners and the dead (Asher-Greve and

Sweeney 126–38; see also Gen. 3:10). Among goddesses, Asherah is the most likely identity as her symbol, a pole, stood in the Jerusalem temple during this period. While functioning as a stand, the pole or tree-shaped lower body of the JPF certainly evokes the goddess's symbol. Furthermore, Ugaritic texts inform us that Asherah mothered 70 children (KTU 1.4 vi:46, edited by Parker). The prominence of our figurine's mammary glands establishes her sex and links her to explicitly female biological activities – bearing children and lactation. This sexual role bolsters the identification of the figurine with Asherah. Alternatively, the figurine may represent an intercessory or “good luck” figure, perhaps a divinized ancestor. Israelites considered their deceased to be divine, *'ēlōhîm* (1 Sam. 28:13; Isa. 8:19) and *tərāpîm*, lifelike images of divinized ancestors, may have performed divinatory functions (Gen. 31:19, 30; 1 Sam. 19:13–16; Ezek. 21:26; Zech. 10:2). However, the controlled, centralized production and relative standardization of the figurines argue against their identification with individualized ancestors. While the identity of the figurine remains inconclusive, we may speculate about its function. Given the prominence of the bosom, perhaps royal authorities mass-produced these figurines to assert the positive value of women nursing their children, thereby promoting the health of the child and protecting mothers from medical complications accompanying pregnancies and births by reducing the frequency of pregnancies.

At the highest level of societal complexity, archaeologists reconstruct integrated systems. “Household archaeology,” with combined social, economic, religious and political facets, exemplifies the approach and its application (see also the essay by Francesca Stavrakopoulou in this volume). Lawrence Stager's 1985 pioneering article modeled this approach to interpreting archaeological remains by incorporating perspectives from the social sciences, historiography and biblical studies. Stager presented Israel's settlements and dwellings as expressions of a social, political and economic settlement strategy for subsistence living in the Cisjordanian central highlands. Stager reconstructed a fully furnished and functioning highland pillared house; Carol Meyers fleshed out the individuals living and working in the house, focusing on women (see further Meyers' essay in this volume). Based on archaeological remains, ancient texts and iconography, Human Relations Area Files data (a database compiled by an academic consortium to study human cultures and societies around the world, past and present), and Middle Eastern studies, Meyers' 1990s work identified gendered labor groups, such as women who passed hours together in the tedious and time-consuming daily tasks of grinding grain and baking bread (Meyers 430–2).

More recently, Yuval Gadot and Assaf Yasur-Landau recreated life in late Iron I Megiddo based on a spacious house that violently burned and collapsed, trapping residents inside with all the house contents (Building 00/K/10; Level K-4). They reconstructed behavioral, social, economic and symbolic aspects to tease out the “habitus,” the organizing “set of ideas, values and perceptions held by members of the society” (Gadot and Yasur-Landau 583). Four or five adults, one child and one infant died in the conflagration. For the authors, these individuals, presumed resident kin, constituted a joint or extended rather than a nuclear family. Spatial analysis, a study of the distribution of all objects from the nine rooms and courtyard, identified a kitchen, a storage room and activity areas for weaving (in conjunction with food preparation), with cultic objects scattered through the house. Exterior spaces served for flint

knapping, the production of bone and antler tools, and the disposal of household trash. The excavators presume traditional gendered roles for the adults in the house. They note the food processing items found with the 30–40-year-old female in the central courtyard, though other items attest to a multifunction space. Similarly, the adult accompanied by a 0–5-year-old and a 5–7-year-old in a room devoted to cooking and weaving is suggested to be a woman. On the conceptual level, the authors distinguish between private and public space, between internal women’s work spaces as private domain with limited and controlled access, and external or outside public space not subject to gendered work or restrictions (Gadot and Yasur-Landau 587–96). While the Bible presents and promotes domestic maintenance roles for women, including cooking, baking, spinning and weaving (Jer. 7:18; Lev. 26:26; 2 Kings 23:7; 2 Sam. 3:29), presuming the Megiddo individuals conform to these biblical dictates perpetuates the biblical gendered roles and obscures actual practices.

The Arad fort with its temple provides another locus of integrated systems, in this case, military, political, economic, administrative and religious. Army commanders taking orders from Jerusalem directed military operations in the region, including moving troops to counter Edom (Ostrakon 24). The fort also served as a redistribution point for collected foodstuffs based on jar labels, inventories and receipts, and for the disbursement of bread, grain, flour, wine, vinegar and oil to Kittim mercenaries and others (Ostraca 1–14, 18, 22, 25, 31, 49 and 60). As a religious center, stones in the niche marked the manifestation of the deity/ies to whom sacrifices were offered on the courtyard altar. We lack information identifying the deity/ies worshipped in the early centuries but military correspondence of the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE invokes only Yahweh (Ostraca 16, 18, 21).

The temple also served a critical function in the Israelite conception of where Yahweh was manifest, of national territorial boundaries, and of Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with his people. This temple, comparable to Jeroboam’s border temples, signified the deity’s proprietary claim to the territory. Temples situated at national boundaries, such as Arad, marked the outermost of a series of concentric circles in which the deity was made manifest at borders and other liminal spaces. Beginning with the innermost circle or family home, sacred texts denoting divine presence were to be written on the doorpost of the house and on the compound gate, serving to demarcate internal, protected space from external space (Deut. 6:4–9). On the civic level, as at Tel Dan and Bethsaida, the deity and perhaps the divinized ancestors stood in the form of *maššēbôt* or stele in the city gate, the liminal zone separating protected from vulnerable space (Biran). At the national level, temples including those at Dan, Bethel and Arad, and Isaiah’s envisioned *maššēbâ* (Isa. 19:19–20), delineated the boundary of Yahweh’s territory and, by extension, his people. This proposed conceptualization demonstrates the need to consider archaeological remains in conjunction with literary evidence to reconstruct early Israelite beliefs.

One advantage of archaeological remains over textual evidence is the relative ease of determining dates. Excavated archaeological assemblages typically represent a single period of deposition datable by material culture such as local and imported pottery, distinctive items known from other contexts, architectural details, and by scientific techniques such as <sup>14</sup>C dating. Subsequent intrusions are generally both identifiable and

datable. By contrast, the repeated reworking of biblical texts complicates disentangling distinct literary strands and assigning dates. Although scholars have made such lofty claims for archaeology, the Arad Temple constitutes an obvious exception. The temple, which was excavated in the early 1960s, had partially collapsed into an underlying water channel, complicating the dating of the successive phases of construction, use and dismantling/destruction. Over the last half-century, improved excavation techniques and recording procedures, refined pottery typologies and scientific dating methods have significantly bettered the dating of archaeological remains.

Historical contexts dated by material culture may assist in identifying and dating biblical accounts if geopolitical reality or verisimilitude underlies the composition of texts. If so, the vicissitudes of Ammonite and Moabite control in Transjordan enable the dating of the composition of texts depicting Moab or Ammon as the threat or oppressor. Changes in settlement distribution, specific objects including pottery and statuary, inscribed items, and the Mesha Stele suggest that through the Iron IIB-C period (ca. ninth through the first quarter of the sixth century BCE), Moab followed by Ammon controlled the territory across the Jordan River from Jericho, rendering Moab (Iron IIB) and only subsequently Ammon (Iron IIC) a threat to the Israelites (Herr 150–1, 168–73; see also the essay by Song-Mi Suzie Park in this volume). This evidence parallels First Isaiah's view of an expansive Moab followed by Jeremiah's expanded Ammon (Isa. 15; compare Isa. 16:8–9 and Jer. 49:3 regarding Heshbon). Accordingly, the Judges 3 story of Ehud and Eglon, king of Moab, may derive from a period of Moabite dominance in Iron IIB, while Jephthah's battle with the Ammonites in Judges 11–12 more likely originates in late Iron IIB or Iron IIC.

The Mesha Stele, commemorating King Mesha of Moab's mid-ninth century BCE defeat of the king of Israel, refers to "the men of Gad" and their involvement with Israel.

Now the men of Gad (had) dwelt in the land of 'Aṭarot from of old and the King of Israel built for (them) 'Aṭarot. And I fought against the city and took it and I killed all the people ... and I caused men of Šaron and men of Maḥarot to dwell in it. (Mesha Inscription (MI), lines 10–13; trans. in Routledge 135–6)

Mesha's "men of Gad" are likely synonymous with the biblical tribe of Gad as they inhabited the same territory. Based on the Mesha Stele, it is arguable that the Gadites did not join Israel until the early ninth century BCE when the Omrides conquered the region and built the city of 'Aṭarot for them (MI, lines 10–11). The relationship ended abruptly with Mesha's conquest in the mid-ninth century BCE. According to this scenario, Gad affiliated with Israel for less than 50 years and only *after* the foundation of the northern kingdom. Biblical authors and editors selectively retrojected the tribe into premonarchic history (Gen. 30:11; Num. 1:14; Deut. 33:20–1). The Judges 5 call to battle includes the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben and Gilead but Gad does not appear among the ten tribes mentioned. Therefore, this list may predate Gad's Israelite affiliation in the early ninth century BCE.

As evident in examples cited, archaeological and biblical data are incomplete, subject to interpretation, and variously weighted in the interpretive process. These limitations give rise to varying reconstructions of both ancient and biblical Israel. Discussions of

biblical Israel's ethnogenesis are illustrative. Did biblical Israel enter Canaan as a nation that was culturally distinct from the indigenous "Canaanites"; did it emerge in a relatively quick and radical departure from the indigenous culture; or was ethnogenesis and religious differentiation a gradual process? Avraham Faust, an archaeologist, exemplifies proponents of the appearance of a culturally distinct Israel in Iron I (see his essay in this volume). Faust argued that Merneptah's "Israel" aspired to an egalitarian ethos by the late thirteenth century BCE. The purported religious value was communicated through architecture and material culture that signaled no status differentiation such as the four-room house, undecorated pottery and simple burials (though none have been found in the central highlands), and is indicated by the absence of high status markers such as decorated and imported pottery. This aspiration, not an actualized reality but a shared ethos, distinguished highland Israelites from the Egypto-Canaanites and, later, the Philistines (Faust 159–63, 221–30).

Countering Faust's proposed egalitarian ethos, functional rather than ideological explanations attribute these same traits to the highland settlers' socioeconomic lifestyle. The quest for "early Israel" is further hampered by our inability to distinguish a "Canaanite" from an "early Israelite." If both peoples inhabited the central highlands, as the Bible describes, then Faust's ethos characterized Israelites and their neighbors alike and so does not serve as a distinguishing trait. Strikingly, Faust insists his "Israel" is biblical Israel based on geographical location but makes no mention of religion or lineage, the distinguishing features according to the Bible.

Raz Kletter also advocated the appearance of a fully formed Israel appearing on the scene, but took a different tack. He effectively eliminated the transitional phase of Iron I to argue for the appearance of a distinctive biblical Israel in Iron II. In discussing Iron I interments, Kletter assigned burials with form and finds derivative of Later Bronze Age culture to Late Bronze Age "Canaanites" and burials with affinities to Iron II practices to Iron II "Israelites," effectively eliminating continuity or overlap in Iron I to create a *de novo* distinctive Israel in Iron IIA (Kletter, "People"). Restoring the admittedly few Iron I tombs to their rightful chronological context demonstrates the gradual evolution of burial practices from the Late Bronze Age into Iron II (Bloch-Smith).

Proponents of the gradual emergence of biblical Israel focus on continuity of material culture from the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age and especially the gradual evolution of religious beliefs and practices stemming from Israel's "Canaanite" or West Semitic heritage (Dever; Smith). Merneptah's late thirteenth-century BCE "Israel" (El worshippers) is not necessarily "biblical Israel" if the latter identifies itself as a community devoted to the worship of *Yahweh*. Relying primarily on Ugaritic and biblical texts, Mark Smith reconstructs a lengthy period of convergence and differentiation from the Late Bronze Age through the Iron Age leading to Israelite monotheism (see his essay in this volume). Smith notes continuity from the earlier into the later period evident in worship of the indigenous deities El, Baal and Asherah and in technical terminology for cultic sacrifices and personnel. Archaeological evidence substantiates Israel's continuation of Bronze Age cultic practices. High places/bāmôt, bull figurines, animal sacrifice on stone altars, standing stones, incense altars and the cherub throne exemplify Bronze Age elements featured in the early Israelite cult (Nakhai; Zevit). Both Tel Dan and Arad's sacred areas include elevated sacred space, standing stones, stone



altars for sacrifice and incense altars (Biran; Aharoni, "Arad"). Biblical texts suggest the persistence of these practices at least until the cultic reforms attributed to the Judahite kings Hezekiah and Josiah in the late eighth and second half of the seventh century BCE respectively (2 Kings 18:4; 23:8, 12, 15). Both archaeology and texts support a reconstruction of a Late Bronze Age "Israel" (Merneptah's "Israel") that gradually becomes "biblical Israel" though assimilating or renouncing indigenous gods and religious practices for the exclusive worship of the foreign god Yahweh.

A second example revolves around the role of the canonical text in interpreting religious features, particularly those that deviate from the biblical ideal. Consider the horned-god stele from Bethsaida and the terracotta horned deities of Qitmit. From a biblical perspective, these depictions of horned gods, that recall Bronze Age horned deities, violate the commandment (of indeterminate date) forbidding images and so must represent foreign deities. Alternatively, given these objects' provenance from sites near or at Israel's and Judah's borders, respectively, they may be foreign-influenced Israelite depictions. Other evidence from these sites may be argued to support either position. In this example, the role of the Bible in the interpretive process dictated the outcome. Questions surrounding the horned deities and Israel's ethnogenesis illustrate the value of evaluating the physical evidence and literary testimony separately and explicitly acknowledging their relative roles in reconstructing Israelite society.

Archaeology offers an independent witness to and alternative perspective on ancient Israel, and the more perspectives, the better our chance of approximating historical reality. Viewing the archaeological and biblical pictures side by side shows convergences and differences. In addition, the archaeological picture fills in elements either omitted or sketchily drawn in the biblical portrait. The chronological schema afforded by archaeology assists in dating the composition of and later additions to biblical texts. Archaeology also provides a tangible experience of the world of ancient Israel, grounding and enlivening the Israelites and their neighbors with the physical remnants of their everyday lives. Through this engagement with the realia of ancient Israel, the significance of the ancient context, and, by extension, the modern context, comes to the fore in interpreting biblical texts.

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