The Emergence of Israel in Canaan: An Update and Criticism

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The Late Bronze Age remains an important period for the formation of Israel, whether one accepts the Biblical record or not. If one accepts the biblical story, the Late Bronze age is the time of the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and the period of the Judges. For those who do not accept the biblical story, they still have to make sense of the "proto-Israelites"[1] of Iron Age I from the highlands,[2] and the appearance of Israel in the Merneptah Stele.[3] This article assumes that

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1. See Raz Kletter, "Can a Proto-Israelite Please Stand Up? Notes on the Ethnicity of Iron Age Israel and Judah," in *I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times*, ed. Aren M. Maeir and Pierre de Miroschedji (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 573-586. He argues convincingly that we can already speak about "Israelites" in the Iron Age I. William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 2003) also refers to some of the people in the hill country of Canaan as "proto-Israelites" (see p. 154 etc.).

2. More specifically, there is a clear increase in the settled population in the central hill country (Ephraim) and Transjordanian highlands. The evidence for a substantial increase in the number of villages at the beginning of Iron Age I is not disputed and is found in numerous publications. See especially the summary of Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300-199 B.C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), and the updated bibliography there. More recently, see Ann. E. Killebrew, "The Social Boundaries of a "Mixed Multitude," in *I Will Speak the Riddles,* 571. For the demographic surge, see also Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites,* 153.

3. For a detailed discussion of the Merneptah Stele and a possible association with a relief from Karnak previously attributed to Ramesses II, see L. Stager, "Merneptah, Israel and Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief," *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985): 56-65. For a more recent analysis of this Stele and its relationship to Israel see Michael G. Hasel, "Merneptah's Reference to Israel: Critical Issues for the Origin of Israel," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 47-60; See also Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites,* 204-208. Note also the balanced analysis of Kent L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*

the Israelites (or if one prefers the "proto-Israelites") were already found in the hill country (especially Ephraim) of the Iron Age I and that there was an actual "Israel" found in Canaan around 1200 BCE.[4] The related questions that emerge are: who are these Israelites and where did they come from?

Recent scholarship tries to avoid the mistakes of the past in which the Iron Age Israelites were identified mainly with the earlier dissatisfied Canaanite peasants of LBA (the so-called "social revolution theory").[5] Instead, the trend is to talk about a "mixed multitude theory."[6] This new theory interprets both the biblical and archaeological evidence "as reflecting a nonhomogeneous, multifaceted, and complex process of Israelite formation and crystallization."[7] It concludes that the inhabitants from the hill country "most likely comprised different elements of the Late Bronze Age society, namely, the rural Canaanite population, displaced peasants and pastoralists, and lawless '*apiru* and *shasu.*"[8] Outside elements probably included "run-away" slaves from Egypt and other nonindigenous groups such as Midianites, Kenites, and Amalekites.[9]

(Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998). For an excellent discussion about Israel in the Merneptah stela as a distinct group that is related with later (monarchic) Israel, see Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and* Resistance (London: Equinox, 2006), 163-168. For even earlier evidence (though disputed) that Israel was in Canaan (c. 1400 B.C.), see the recent article of Peter van der Veen, Christoffer Theis, and Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (Long) on Before Merneptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2, no. 4 (November 2010): 15-25.

4. For a recent convincing argument that this is indeed the case, see Ralph K. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013).

5. In my opinion this theory associated with George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald is rightly called the "revolting peasant theory" by A. Rainey, "Can You Name the Panel with the Israelites? Rainey's Challenge," *BAR* 17, no. 6 (November/December 1991): 59-60. One major problem with this theory is the complete lack of textual evidence from the Late Bronze Age. See also Faust, *Israel's* Ethnogenesis, 178-182. But see Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 182-189.

6. For an excellent review of four of the major schools of thought about the emergence of Israel in Canaan see the article of Ann. E. Killebrew, "Social Boundaries," 555-572. Note that Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 181-182, supports the "mixed multitude" theory. He calls them a "motley crew" which includes urban dropouts, the 'apiru and other "social bandits," refugees, and pastoral nomads.

7. Killebrew, "Social Boundaries," 566.

8. Killebrew, "Social Boundaries," 571.

9. Killebrew, "Social Boundaries." See also more recently Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 186-187. He also accepts the theory that "ancient Israel was composed of peoples who came from various backgrounds...probably even a group who

In my opinion, this is a welcome and improved theory about a complex and difficult subject.[10] However, it is not without major problems. First, it remains vague in its description because it does not attempt to give an approximate break up of this "mixed multitude." Second, it runs the danger of trying to "pacify" or unite (almost) all previous theories.[11] This "mixed multitude" seems to support (at least partially) the conquest model, the peaceful infiltration, social revolution, and the pastoral Canaanite theories. It remains to prove, however, how such a mixed and diverse crowd could unite together and get along well enough during Iron Age I in Canaan to become the Israel of the Bible. At this point there is no plausible theory that is able to unite such a diverse group into what later would become Israel.[12] The greatest problem with the "mixed

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fled from Egypt." The original group included many Shasu along with some non-sedentary 'outcast' population. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 125 also supports the 'mixed multitude' make up of early Israel. For him, *How Israel Became a People*, 208: "most of the early Israelites entered Canaan from the east as transhumant pastoralists." And "if the ancient Hebrews were not Shasu, "they must have closely resembled them." Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People,* 90.

10. Note that the Biblical record in Joshua and Judges does indicate that the Israelites were joined by other people groups (see especially Joshua 6:23-35; Joshua 10-11 etc.). The expression "mixed multitude" is from Exodus 12:38.

11. On these two points see Faust's effort to bring some clarity in *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 172-175. Faust says that the "consensus today is that all previous suggestions have some truth regarding the origins of the ancient Israelites." The point of dispute has to do with the rations of the various groups in the Iron I population. Faust, 173.

12. But see Faust's attempt to explain how these groups merged, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 173-175. Killebrew, "Social Boundaries," 570, briefly addresses the problem of explaining the bonds that linked "this loosely interconnected, kinship-based rural society" and their clear isolation from the fellow Canaanites in the lowlands. In her opinion "ideology may have played a key role in the process." More specifically, she notes that a number of scholars "stressed that Yahweh worship must have been introduced into Israel from outside" perhaps through their contact with the Midianites or other outside groups. Noting the "boundary" that exists between the highland villages and the sites in the lowlands, she concludes that this "border may have been the result of social, economic, or ideological differences between the lowland sites and some of the highland settlements." See "Social Boundaries," 571. She is more specific in her earlier book on this issue as she gives more emphasis to the importance of religion: "Over time these disparate groups were united by the worship of Yahweh, a powerful ideology that formed the core of early Israelite ethnogenesis and distinguished them from their Canaanite origins." See *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 150. I find her explanations confusing as she seems to give considerable weight to religion (but note "over time"), while she also explains the "boundary" between the highland villages and the lowland sites as being "the result social

multitude" theory is that there is no convincing archaeological support for it. If we are having a very difficult time to distinguish between Israelites and Canaanites, how then could we possibly distinguish between the various groups that supposedly made up this "mixed multitude?" In fact, most of these theories that argue for a "mixed multitude" present the majority of the "proto-Israelites" as rural Canaanites,[13]divided into peasants and pastoralists.

The goal of this paper is to test the aforementioned "Canaanites to (proto) Israelites" theory.[14] While there can be little doubt that some Canaanites were part of (proto) Israel,[15] it will be shown that the

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and economic, *or* ideological difference" (*italics mine*). In any case, it is not clear how the worship of Yahweh (presumably brought from the outside by a small number of slaves or nomads) won the day and became the deity of the majority indigenous Canaanites.

13. See especially Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 153. He specifically states that the highland settlers were not "foreign invaders." For Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 173, the ethnic (or 'identity') group by the name of Israel (as mentioned in the Merneptah Stela) was "the most dominant one." Killebrew, despite the fact that she favors a "mixed multitude" theory, thinks that recent archaeological evidence supports the indigenous, probably nonurban, Canaanite origin for the Iron I inhabitants of the hill country villages. "Social Boundaries," 562,

14. Note that even the term 'Canaanite' is disputed today. Thus, Mark Smith avoids the term because it "is a misleading term that often clouds analysis." Because too little is known of a coherent Canaanite culture, he uses the broader term "West Semitic." *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 597, Kindle. Richard Hess also prefers this term in his *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). In my opinion the term is too broad to be of much use, especially for this essay. No one would argue that the Israelites were not a West Semitic people. If I had adopted this broad term this essay could not be written because both the Canaanites and the Israelites were West Semitic people. But note that the later Moabites and Edomites were also Semites, however, the Israelites were clearly not Moabites or Edomites. For this essay, I follow Beth Alpert-Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (ASOR Books 7. Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001), 25-26, on the terms Canaan and Canaanites. Thus, geographically Canaan refers to the territory extending from central Lebanon to Israel's desert region, and from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean. The Canaanites are the residents of the city-states from this general area (though my concern is mostly with the area "from Dan to Beer-Sheba") who shared elements of religion, architecture, language and material culture. While the Bible suggests that the geographical area of Canaan contained a mixture of people (Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Canaanites, and etc.), at this point no real distinction can me made convincingly between these groups based on the archaeological evidence.

15. See note 1.

archaeological evidence does not support the theory that early Israel (or proto-Israel) was formed mostly of Canaanites. To prove my point, I will enter act with two major recent works that argue that early Israel was not formed of indigenous Canaanites. Subsequently, I will deliver the essential elements that support the argument that early Israel was different from the indigenous Canaanites: food, burial practices, settlement patterns, and the cult. While the focus in this paper will be on the archaeological evidence, it is useful to review briefly the Egyptian textual evidence of the preceding Late Bronze Age period.

Textual Evidence

The Egyptian records by themselves are not very helpful for an attempt to reconstruct the settlement pattern of Canaan during the Late Bronz period.[16] They consist mainly of a series of military campaigns and are useful mostly for the Asiatic toponyms mentioned in them and for the "people" that are encountered in these campaigns. The difficulty comes when one tries to identify these toponyms with the known places in Canaan and when one attempts to figure out the social and political condition of the groups of people mentioned in the inscriptions. The Amarna Letters (c. 1360-1330 B.C.)[17] offer some solutions. Their shorcomings in illuminating the Late Bronze Age are due to the vagueness in the descriptions and due also to the short period that they cover.[18]

Despite the shortcomings of the Egyptian texts, the following brief sketch is possible and generally accepted about the Canaanite landscape during the Late Bronze Age.[19] After the expulsion of the Hyksos, the Egyptian policy does not seem to have been developed cleary. Egypt probably relied mainly on military campaigns concentrated on the main highways. After the rebellion at Megiddo, Egyptians adopted more aggressive imperial messures to control the local princes by having

16. For a recent analysis of Late Bronze age Canaan see my article "The Canaanite Landscape during the Late Bronze Age," *Canon & Culture* 6, no. 1 (2012): 39-68. The discussion in this section relies mainly on this article.

17. For a discussion about the chronology and the type of correspondence found in the Amarna Letters see W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), xiii-xxxix. For my research, the so-called "vassal correspondence" between the officials from Syria-Palestine and the Egyptian court are of special importance. See the brief discussion below and my article from note 16.

18. The vagueness result because they assume that the toponyms and people mentioned in them are well known to the addressee.

19. See Rata, "The Canaanite Landscape," 59-60.

regular campaings and by establishing treaties and marriage alliances. Thus, during the LB I there is strong evidence of an increasing Egyptian authority in Canaan concentrated on the major routes and cities. The information about the fringe areas (Shephelah, hill country, eastern side of Jordan etc.) is almost completely lacking.

Our knowledge of the more turbulent Late Bronze Age IIA is illuminated by the Amarna tablets. During this time, most likely due to internal weakness, the Egyptians paid little attention to events outside their borders. The texts support a decrease in the city population; there were constant threats from the *'Apiru* and other outcasts from areas that used to be under Egyptian control. For the first time we get some understanding about the settlements in the hill country. There are a few great cities (e.g., Hazor and Shechem) which act as territorial kingdoms with control over extensive areas.

During the 19th dynasty (LB IIB), the Egyptians took a more active role in Canaan by establishing various administrative centers to improve their military and economic interests. Public security seems to have improved and the threat from non-sedentary groups (e.g., *'Apiru* and *Shasu*) seem to be contained.

One text deserve special attention in connection with Late Bronze Canaan and the appearance of ancient Israel: the Merneptah Stele (c. 1208 BCE).[20] Since this text was discussed extensively in literature,[21] it is sufficient to say that most interpreters recognize the mention of Israel as a people group[22] somewhere in southern Canaan, perhaps to the east of Gezer which is also mentioned in the text. Thus, Hoffmeier believes that the mention of Israel in the Merneptah Stele "suggests that tribal Israel was already a significant presence in the Levant" before

20. For an Egyptian text that may mention Israel even earlier, see the last article in note 3.

21. For references see note 3.

22. But notice the indefensible position of Emauel Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine* (Equinox: London, 2009), 171-72, who are argues that the only possibility, on the basis of a positive epigraphic identification of 'Israel' in Merneptah's stele, is that such a name had survived afterwards in the territory and was adopted later by the people from the highlands. His position is close to that of G. W. Ahlström, *Who Were the Israelites* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 37-43. For Pfoh, "if Merneptah's 'Israel' is a people – as the hieroglyohic determinative signs mark – we should rather think of some kind of tradition for the name to survive in the Omride kingdom and then in Judah's later self-identification." I find puzzling his 'if,' as it is well known that that the determinative in front of Israel is for a people group. Note that even a 'minimalist' like Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 430-431, thinks that the Israel of Merneptah's stele is "a fully developed tribal organization."

1200 BCE.[23] This text is significant because it is the earliest mention of Israel outside of the Bible, and Israel seems to be an important people group distinct from the inhabitants of the other Canaanite cities at the end of Late Bronze Age.

The archaeological sources are more promising for describing early Israel, especially considering the latest published surveys,[24] but it is my perception that a good understanding of the transition from the MB II to the LB I is lacking in the archaeological circles.[25] A more major problem is the fact that the results from the surveys are inherently vague; in the best case they make a distinction between a LB I and a LB II occupation of the site.[26] The situation from the excavated is better for establishing settlement patterns, but some of the supposed gaps at certain sites (e.g., Tell Beit Mirsim, Jericho, Shechem) have been recently questioned.[27] Despite these shortcomings, my analysis will continue with the reasonable assumption that there is considerable evidence now available from the excavated sites to attempt an in-depth analysis of burial practices, diet, and even cultic life. Two recent works that rely mainly on the archaeological data are especially relevant for this discussion.

23. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33. See also Volmar Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel in the Twelfth and Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 80-82, who sees Israel as a people a reality at the end of the Late Bronze Age. It is not clear, however, their origin, composition, and exact settlement region. On the Israel of Merneptah Stela see also notes 3 and 4.

24. See bibliography.

25. See W. G. Dever, "The Chronology of Syria-Palestine: Current Issues," *BASOR* 288 (November 1992): 3, 14-17. He suggests a transitional MB III/LB IA period (1500-1450 B.C.), but there is no agreement as to when the transition between MB and LB takes place.

26. Note also that the findings may be used only as positive evidence. One can establish that people were present at a site during particular periods. The determination of gaps in settlement *e silentio*, by the fact that pottery from certain periods is missing, is unreliable. See M. Weippert, "The Israelite 'Conquest' and the Evidence from Transjordan," in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900-1975)*, ed. F. M. Cross (Cambridge: ASOR, 1979), 28 and bibliography there for some problems of surface surveys. For a more recent discussion on the problems of the surveys, see Y. Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, "Khirbet Qeiyafa in Survey and in Excavations: A Response to Y. Dagan," *Tel Aviv* 37 (2010): 77. Also, to my knowledge there are no specialist reports published on most of the surveyed sites (e.g., Osteologist, Paleobotanist, etc.).

27. Some of the suggestions for these gaps were made on the basis of the lack of certain ceramic groups. This evidence from silence is inconclusive.

Two Recent Proposals: Faust and Hawkins[28]

In this section I will briefly present and analyze two recent proposals that deal with Israel's emergence in Canaan.[29] They are analyzed because both of them are highly relevant to my thesis due to the fact that they move away from the theory still espoused by many scholars that most of the Israelites were Canaanites.[30] More significantly, both of these works are important because they make very good use of the latest archaeological findings and mount themselves solid critiques against the thesis that most of the early Israel is formed of Canaanites.

In 2008 Avraham Faust published a book about Israel's ethnogenesis. As the title of the book suggests, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance*, Faust is mainy preoccupied about Israel's ethnogenesis – the historical creation of a people with a sense of collective identity.[31] Thus, while he realizes the importance and relevance of the question of Israelite's origins in the sense of descent, he separates

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28. To this could be added the fairly recent work in English of Volkmar Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel in the Twelfth and Eleventh Centuries BCE* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). However, this book will not be discussed in detail because it is based on his considerably earlier German monograph from 1996, *Die Entstehung Israels im 12. und 11. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* For Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, 135, the radical change in settlement patterns "were the result of a change in the political population; they cannot be understood as the continuation of the Late Bronze Age city culture." He discusses the settlement patterns, the layout of the settlements, and the accumulation of the four-room houses in the Early Iron Age settlements. His conclusions are important as they also support the theory that early Israel is formed of "new settlers," probably connected with the *Hapiru* and *Shasu* from various sources. According to Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, 137, "the resettlement of the land does not go back to the former city population but rather is the result of groups settling down, those who had previously persisted outside the city in an unsettled way of life." Later, he also thinks that "groups of different origin congregated together into a community, which then during the monarchic period let to the idea of a single people." See Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, 138.

29. I am referring to the works of Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis* and the more recent work (2013) of Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*. At the same time I will pay special attention to the works of Killebrew and Dever. See note 1 for the 11 references cited.

30. See the introduction and references above. Finkelstein, Dever, and Killebrew are some of the most influential scholars who believe that most of the Israelites were Canaanites. Even though they all seem to agree that early Israel was formed from a "mixed multitude" – they also believe that most of them were Canaanites, whether "dissatisfied peasant" (Dever) or pastoralists (Finkelstein).

31. See Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 19 for some working definitions of 'ethnogenesis.'

it and considers it irrelevant to the issue addressed in his book and "to the understanding of the nature and formation of Israelite ethnicity."[32]

In his methodology he relies mainly on archaeology which is "well equipped to deal with the ancient society." He starts by focusing on Iron Age II "when it is agreed that there was an Israelite ethnicity,"[33] and then traces the emergence of these features back to the end of the Late Bronze Age. In most cases the archaeological record is examined by itself, without agenda influenced by the written sources. Since the texts are "extrememly problematic on issues of dating and redaction," and they demonstrate "extreme partiality and bias,"[34] the main research questions "should be delineated based on an exhaustive examination of patterns in the material record." Anthropological methods are used to explain the archaeological finds.[35]

While identifying ethnic[36] groups in the archaeological record is "notoriously difficult,"[37] Faust is convinced that "in most cases, clear relationships between material culture and ethnicity can be identified, however complicated they may be . . . , and the potential of archaeological inquiry to deal with such issues should not be underestimated."

With this background and methodology, Faust proceeds in the second part of his monograph to examinate archaeologically the markers for Israelite ethnicity. After a brief note on pottery and ethnicity, [38]

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32. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 28. This issue of origin is for Faust "of lesser importance for the presence discussion, as interesting and important as it may be." However, it interesting to note the comment on the same page in note 15: "The only exception is if one accepts the view that all Israelites came from Egypt – in which case their ethnogenesis was, of course earlier, making the study of their ethnogenesis in the present context, including this monograph, obsolete." Note that Faust does discuss the issue of origins in Chapter 18 of his book.

33. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 8. Iron I was a key period when the symbols of identity were canonized, especially in the later interaction with the Philistines.

34. But note the comment of Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 17: "The difficulties inherent in any attempt to identify symbolic traits in the archaeological record require that attention be given also to written sources. Although sometimes quite problematic, a careful examination of these sources is needed in order to extract maximum information and gain insights to the society in question . . . ."

35. All the citations in this paragraph are from Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 5.

36. Faust starts from the premise that ethnic groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with other groups. Thus, the ethnic boundaries of a group are defined by "the idiosyncratic use of specific material and behavioral symbols as compared with other groups." Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 15.

37. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 11.

38. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 34. He picks up the issue of "pots and peo-

he proceeds to discuss the following "ethnic markers" for ancient Israel: meat consumption (the avoidance of pig meat in the diet of the people who lived in the highlands at the beginning of Iron Age I), the absence of painted decoration on the local pottery of Israel's highlands, the almost complete absence of imported pottery, the pottery repertoire (very limited as compared to the Canaanite and Philistine), the four-room house, circumcision, and hierarchy and equality.[39]

The chapter on hierarchy and equality is based on Faust' analysis of the previous chapters. Thus, the Israelites' "egalitarian ethos" is "reflected in the limited repertoire of Iron Age I pottery, the four-room house plan, and the lack of imported pottery." He now adds a few additional traits: the burials, the temples, and royal inscriptions.

Faust notes the virtual absence of Iron Age burials in the highlands prior to the ninth-eight centuries, and points out the sharp contrast to the Late Bronze Age in all parts of the country (highlands and lowlands).[40] The following quote is highly relevant for this point:[41]

> While there was a variety of burials in Late Bronze Age Canaan, which could result from several reasons of which social hierarchy is but one, the Iron I lacks even the 'multiple cave burials' that characterized the highland throughout most of the second millennium BCE . . . , therefore breaking a continuity that prevailed through wide segments of Canaanite society for almost 800 years . . . . Even if a few Iron I burials are identified in the highlands . . . , the general pattern is striking: during the Late Bronze Age the highlands were only sparsely settled but many tombs are known . . . , while during the Iron Age the area was filled with settlements but such burials are practically absent.

Faust's conclusion from these observations is that the individuals from this period were buried in simple inhumations, and the lack of observable burials reflects an egalitarian ideology which is in sharp contrast to Late Bronze Age Canaanite traditions.[42]

The lack of real temples from most sites (especially from Iron I) that can be labeled as Israelite is also in contrast to the Late Bronze Age

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ples" later in chapter 19, but here he makes it clear that "ethnicity could very well be expressed through decoration or repertoire."

39. Note that the argument about circumcision (ch. 10) is based mainly on the Bible and not on archaeological data.

40. For a more in-depth analysis of this point see A. Faust, "Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology: The Lack of Highlands Iron Age I Burials in Context," *IEJ* 54 (2004): 174-190.

41. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93.

42. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93.

when temples were abundant.[43] Even during the Iron Age II, the Israelite sites show "no signs of an organized or public cult." This again stands in contrast to several Canaanite-Phoenician villages where an organized cult is present and there is similarity to Bronze Age Canaanite villages.[44]

The absence to date of an Israelite royal inscription, despite the fact that Israel is much more excavated than its ancient neighbors (e.g., Aram, Amon, Moab, Philistia), is another trait that Faust attributes to an egalitarian ethos. He notes that the Siloam inscription does not reference the king, the kingdom, and even God.[45]

Based mainly on these observations, Faust ventures in the fourth section of his book (ch. 18) to make some comments about the origins of ancient Israel. Here is Faust's conclusion:[46]

> [I]t seems as if ancient Israel was composed of peoples who came from various backgrounds: a semi-nomadic population who lived on the fringe of settlement, settled Canaanites who for various reasons changed their identity, tribes from Transjordan, and probably even a group who fled Egypt. In the end it is likely that many, if not most, Israelites had Canaanite origins. This was clearly the case in the period of the monarchy, in which many Canaanites in the lowland became Israelites. The intake of people of various backgrounds was at times the main source of Israel's population increase, in addition to natural growth; they all integrated and assimilated into the main group Israel. The original group – those who came on the "Mayflower" to use Dever's metaphor – likely included many Shasu along with (given their importance in Late Bronze Egyptian sources on Cisjordan) some non-sedentary "outcast" population.

According to Faust's reconstruction, the primary source of the settlement's earliest population is to be found in seminomads found on both sides of the Jordan. These semi-nomads probably came from among the Shasu groups and perhaps included a small group of 'local' 'Apiru (these are the outcast Canaanites). Thus, "it is likely that the early settlers did not originate directly from Canaanite, or at least, mainstream settled Canaanite society; they more likely came from groups who were

43. For example, Daniel Warner, *The Archaeology of Canaanite Cult: An Analysis of Canaanite Temples from the Middle and Late Bronze Age in Palestine* (Saarbrücken: VDM Publishing, 2008), 236, finds 18 temples from seven different sites in Canaan.

44. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93-94. Note also his important observation that religion is an important factor for the enhancement of ethnicity. He relies for this on the following article of L. E. Stager, "Forging an Identity: the Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 123-75.

45. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 94-95

46. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 186-87.

not fully sedentary, did not use imported and decorated pottery, had a limited ceramic repertoire, used simple inhumations, and embraced a relatively egalitarian ethos."[47]

Very recently, in 2013, Ralph K. Hawkins published a book about how Israel became a people.[48] More precisely, his goal is "to reconstruct the emergence of early Israel as a socio-ethnic entity with its own distinctive culture in the hill-country of Canaan."[49] He tried "to approach the subject of Israel's emergence in Canaan from a neutral perspective," by considering all the evidence and by drawing reasonable conclusions from the data.[50]

The two main "texts" used by Hawkins to accomplish his goal are the Hebrew Bible and archaeology.[51] For him, even though the biblical narratives are "ideologically driven," the tremendous emphasis in the Bible on recalling and remembering the past shows that we are dealing with a book very concerned with the subject of history.[52] More specifically, even though the writer of the book of Joshua is "preaching" by using material selectively and has primarily religious concerns, the book is still "historical in nature."[53]

After a review of "classical and recent models of the Israelite settlement" in chapter 2, he states that the theory "that the Israelites originated from among the indigenous population of Canaan appears to have become the most popular view today, and it is taught in many gradu-

47. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 183-84. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 178-183, devotes several pages to evaluate the 'Canaanite Origins School." His conclusion from these pages is that the first Israelites "were most likely *not* settled Canaanites," and "the Canaanite origins theory is insufficient." There is a low level of continuity with the preceding culture, and if the first Israelites were Canaanites, it cannot be explained why they did not bury their dead like their ancestors among others.

48. See note 4 for the full reference. A specific question that he is concerned about is the following: "How did the Israelites define themselves, in contrast to the indigenous inhabitants of the land of Canaan?" See Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 23-24.

49. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 25-26.

50. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 264, Kindle.

51. Archaeology alone is not sufficient to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel. See his discussion on the limitations of both the texts and archaeological data and the call for a 'holistic approach' that takes into consideration all the available materials on pp. 26-28.

52. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 13-14. Note, however, that Hawkins is not arguing that the biblical writers wrote history in the modern sense. See his useful explanations in chapter 1 (pp. 3-18). The biblical text is both kerygmatic and is a valuable source of historiographical data.

53. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 18-23.

ate schools and seminaries as fact."[54] This view, defended most recently by William G. Dever, is rejected by Hawkins.[55] He concludes that all of these models (classical and contemporary) have strengths and weaknesses.[56] Even though the indigenous models are "in vogue", there is an increasing awareness of the need to consider the role of nommadic outsiders. More specifically, the Shasu which are mentined in Late Bronze Age Egyptian texts.

The next two chapters (3 and 4) deal with the possible date for the Exodus, and concludes that the biblical and extrabiblical evidence points to the late date for the exodus, in the 13th century BCE. Also, his understanding of the Merneptah stele supports 1210 BCE as the terminus ante quem for the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan.[57]

After Hawkins looks at the major cities of the conquest in chapter five (especially Jericho, Ai, Hazor, and Dan), he proceeds in chapters six through ten to deal specifically with the early Israelite settlement. Despite the fact that it is very difficult to use physical data for ethnic identification,[58] it is possible. The following traits are used to identify the highland sites from Ephraim and Manasse as Israelite: settlement pattern, site layout, the foor-room house, pottery, and foodways.[59]

Hawkins' conclusion is that the earliest Israelites were seminomads with an economy based on sheep husbandry similar to the Shasu groups encountered by the Egyptians. However, he agrees with the biblical tradition and the views of many recent scholars, that even early Israel was a "mixed group." What united the disparate tribes and the "mixed group" on non-Israelites, all of whom participated in an exodus from Egypt, was "social and religious ideology."[60] Unlike most of the recent scholars, Hawkins emphasizes the religious ideology of this "holy nation" who was committed to Yahweh in a covenant ceremony at Sinai as the main unifiying factor. Others could be 'converted' and join the "holy nation" by embracing Yahwism.[61]

54. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 46.

55. See further the discussion below. Dever's main work is referenced in note 1.

56. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 48.

57. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 90.

58. Note that this is also recognized by Faust in the discussion above. For Hawkins, Israel's identity did not imply a racial principle; it had more to do with self-ascription and ascription by others.

59. See especially Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 139.

60. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 155-56.

61. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 156-158.

For Hawkins, the data points to "a modified version of Alt-Noth hypothesis that focuses on culture scale."[62] In conclusion, the textual and archaeological data militates against the predominant theories with their focus on the Canaanite origin for the highland settlers at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Israel's emergence occurs as a natural progression in three stages:[63]

> In the first two stages, the Hebrew tribes exist as a domestic-scale culture that was originally transhumant but, in a subsequent stage, sedentarized in highland villages. In the third stage, the sedentarized Israelite village culture developed into a political-scale culture.

Evaluation and Criticism

It is significant to note that both of these recent major works that dealt with the emergence of Israel in Canaan moved away from the indigenous origin hypothesis for the early Israelites. At the same time, however, there is agreement with many of the scholars on the other side in that there seems to be a consensus that early Israel was made up of a "mixed-group."[64]

It is also significant that in both of these evaluations there is overlap. Thus, both Faust and Hawkins agree that the evidence from pottery, foodways, and the four-room house all argue against the indigenous origin of earliest Israel, the one found as a people group in the Merneptah stele. In my opinion, most of the traits discussed by these scholars are important and relevant to effectively counter the popular theory that the early Israelites were Canaanites: the foodways, pottery repertoire and forms, settlement pattern, burials, the four-room house, and worship places. Even if one may quibble with some or with each of these traits, the cumulative evidence is too strong to be neglected. Thus, someone who supports the indigenous Canaanites theory would have to explain why the lowland Canaanites left their cities to settle in the highlands, changed their diet and burial practices, stopped decorating

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62. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 192-94. He sees the Alt-Noth hypothesis as comporting much more closely with the evidence. However, he believes there were military campaigns in the first stage (unlike Alt-Noth), campaigns that "were essentially sorties" with Gilgal as a possible military staging ground. There was a conquest, but it was certainly not a "blitzkrieg." See his conclusion on p. 206.

63. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 192-93.

64. And to these can be added the work of Volkmar Fritz. See note 27 for details.

and importing their pottery, and developed (what seems to be) an egalitarian ethos.

For the rest of this essay, I would like to briefly review and present what I consider the strongest evidences for the distinctiveness of the Israelites. In the process, I will criticize some of the previous proposals and I will also point out a problematic (major) omission in recent discussions about the emergence of ancient Israel and suggest how the approach to this issue be improved. Though the evidence from pottery forms and repertoire is highly relevant and important, the traits that I consider the strongest for the distinctiveness of early Israel are foodways, burials, settlement pattern, and religion. In fact, as we shall see, religion is the major omission in most recent discussion of early Israel.

Foodways: Meat Consumption

When attempting to define an ethnic identity, one of the most important features for anthropologists is cuisine.[65] In the context of ancient Israel the relevant trait is the avoidance of pig meat. In fact, even Israel Finkelstein, who believes that the Israelites were Canaanites, recognizes that "pig taboos are emerging as the main, if not the only avenue that can shed light on ethnic boundaries in the Iron I . . . [;] this may be the most valuable tool for the study of ethnicity of a given, single Iron I site."[66]

Both Faust[67] and Hawkins[68] recognize the importance of pig taboos and that the fact that pig remains are almost completely absent at Iron Age I sites in the highlands. While this trait is usually used to contrast

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65. See J. Golden, *Ancient Israel and Canaan* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 63. For him this is "one important indicator that a new, distinct cultural identity was in the works."

66. I. Finkelstein, "Ethnicity and the Origin of the Iron I Settlers in the Highlands of Canaan: Can the Real Israel Stand Up?" *BA* 59, no. 4 (1996): 206. See also I. Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origins of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 119-20. In another article Finkelstein recognizes that L. Stager was correct when he predicted that "food taboos, more precisely, pig taboos, are emerging as the main, if not only, avenue that can shed light on ethnic boundaries in the Iron I." See Finkelstein, "Pots and People Revisited: Ethnic Boundaries in the Iron Age I," in *The Archaeology of Israel, Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. N. A. Silberman and D. B. Small (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 230.

67. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 35-40.

68. See Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 152-54.

the Israelites' diet with that of the Philistines,[69] it is also relevant when compared with the diet of the Canaanites.[70]

There is no cogent ecological explanation for the lack of pig meat in the Iron I highland sites, because they are found, "sometimes in large quantities, in Bronze Age sites in the highlands and lowlands."[71] Faust correctly points out that "[t]he fact that some of the Bronze Age sites are villages precludes any claim that pigs are not suitable for a rural setting and thus are absent from the Iron I highland villages."[72] Since the archaeological evidence shows that the Canaanites "did not usually practice pig avoidance," Faust is correct to conclude that when a site indicates pork consumption to a small degree, "it can be identified as both non-Israelite and non-Philistine – leaving us with what we loosely called 'Canaanites.'"[73]

In my opinion, this difference in food preference is a very strong argument that the Israelites were not Canaanites. Since the Canaanites in the Late Bronze Age did not avoid pork in both the lowland and the highlands, and the pig avoidance in the highlands continues from Iron I into the Iron II (when we know that the people living there are Israelites), it is more reasonable to assume that we are dealing with a new group in the highlands. And instead of coming up with modern explanations with weak explanatory powers (e.g., ecological reasons, pastoralist background etc.), it may be more reasonable to accept Israel's own religious explanation for the taboo (see Lev 11:7-8; Deut 14:8).

69. Note that pig constitutes some 23 percent of the faunal assemblage at Ashkelon, 18 percent at Miqne/Ekron, etc. See Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 36, for more complete statistics. In the highlands the percentage of pig bones is usually under 0.4 percent in Iron Age I.

70. But see the disagreement of Block-Smith with arguments in "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What Is Remembered and What Is Forgotten in Israel's History," *JBL* 122, no. 3 (October 2003): 409-10. Also Emanuel Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2009), 165, does not find convincing the absence of pig bones as an Israelite ethnic marker. For him, the "taboo on swine consumption among the Israelites should be explained as rooted in local dietary manners of the second millennium BCE, which were perhaps related to ecological conditions, as well as the pastoralist background of many of the hill-country settlers (since pastoralists in general avoid pigs)."

71. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 36-7. See his relevant statistics for pork consumption in Canaan in the Bronze Age.

72. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 37. He also demonstrates that the Israelites did not consume pork during the Iron Age II.

73. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 39. The statistics show that Canaanite pork consumption is "somewhere between that of the Israelites, who avoided it, and the Philistines, who consumed it in large quantities during the Iron Age I."

Burials

The importance of burials for the identification of the population from the highlands at the end of the Late Bronze Age is rarely discussed in the relevant literature. One important exception to this is Avraham Faust who dedicates about one page to this issue in his work on Israel's ethnogenesis. He discusses this in the context of evaluating Israel's egalitarian ethos,[74] but this is also significant because it further distinguishes the highland people from the Canaanites of the lowlands and the coast.

We know that there is a virtual lack of early Iron Age burials in the central highlands, and this is a unique reality because we have hundreds of burials from other periods, including the Late Bronze Age and later phases of the Iron Age. Thus, during the Late Bronze Age when there is a low density of occupation in the highlands, there are a relatively large number of burials identified and quite distinguishable archaeologically. In contrast, during the early Iron Age, when we have hundreds of new settlements in the highlands and an evident population increase, the burials are almost completely lacking.[75] More specifically, "the Iron I lacks even the 'multiple cave burials' that characterized the highland throughout most of the second millennium BCE, therefore breaking a continuity that prevailed through wide segments of Canaanite society for almost 800 years."[76]

The logical conclusion for this lack of burials in early Iron I in the highlands is that the individuals were buried in "simple inhumations," and this supports the existence of an egalitarian ethos in early Israel.[77]

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74. See Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 92-93. Avraham Faust deals with this issue in more detail in the following article: "Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology: The Lack of Highlands Iron Age I Burials in Context," *IEJ* 54 (2004): 174-90. See also the work of Raz Kletter, "People Without Burials? The Lack of Iron Age Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine," *IEJ* 52 (2002): 28-48, and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith in *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), and "Resurrecting the Iron I Dead," *IEJ* 54 (2004): 77-91.

75. For more on this see Faust, "Mortuary Practices," 174-83 and *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 92-93.

76. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93.

77. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93. Notice further the comment of Faust (personal communication by email on October 31, 2013):"While it is possible that some Canaanites were buried in simple inhumation during the Late Bronze Age (possibly in the highlands and the lowlands alike), this is not yet known (but I assume that some people were buried this way in all periods). We are familiar with hundreds of LBA burials, but they are more elaborate, and are easily found archaeologically. The difference between what we know of the LBA burials and what we know of those of the Iron I is striking . . . ." But note the

Since burials have an important social role, and societies don't change their burial patterns 'overnight,' this is another important feature that distinguishes between the Late Bronze Age Canaanites and the settlers in the central highlands. Had the highland settlers been Canaanites, they would have buried their dead like their ancestors.[78]

Settlement Patterns

Another major reason to infer the presence of a new people group in the central highlands is the settlement pattern at the end of the Late Bronze Age.[79] We have solid archaeological evidence "of dramatic settlement activity early in the twelfth century B.C.E"[80] in the central hill country. More specifically, there seems to be a dramatic increase in the number of settlements in the hill country and also in the population. Thus, Stager estimates an increase from 88 Late Bronze Age sites (c. 200 hectares) and a population of 50,000 people to 678 Iron Age I sites (c. 600 hectares) and a population of 150, 000 people.[81] Most of the Iron Age I sites (633) were built on new foundations and consisted of small unwalled villages. The following table shows my personal esti-

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comments of Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I," 424: "If, as postulated by this model, Israel incorporated various groups each with its own primordial and circumstantial features, then in the early stages of assimilation a variety of traits might be attested among the constituent groups. So, for instance, some might bury their dead in nearby cave or chamber tombs, while others returned to distant ancestral grounds." Unfortunately, Bloch-Smith does not provide solid evidence for these early Iron Age I burials. She also does not accept Faust's argument about the egalitarian ethos of early Israel. According to her (personal communication by email on November 5th, 2013), "Faust's argument is from silence – he has no graves to substantiate his position."

78. See also the tentative conclusion of Killbrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 176-177, about burial practices.

79. Note that even Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I," 402, 411, recognizes that the new settlements "in territory allegedly settled by Israel" are a link to Merneptah's Israel or biblical Israel.

80. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 121. There are many studies that deal with the settlements in the hill country. See for example the articles in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, ed. I. Finlekstein and N. Na'aman, *Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society*, 1994. A more complete list of surveys (compiled by Todd Bolen and A. D. Riddle) in Israel and Jordan can be found here: (accessed, November 11, 2013) http://www.bible-places.com/download/Archaeological%20Surveys%20Bibliography.pdf. See also the bibliography in Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*.

81. He looks at 9 areas including places in Moab and Edom. See Stager, "Forging an Identity," 134-35.

mates based on surveys only from Israel. It includes estimates from the Middle Bronze Age II.[82]

Table 1. Data from surveys in MB II, LB, and IA I Canaan

REGION	MBII	LB	IA I
Upper Galilee	?	3 (+2?)	40
Lower Galilee	28	6 (+3?)	23
Manasseh	135	31	111
Ephraim	60	5 (+1)	115
Benjamin	V	2(+1?)	31(+6?)
Hill country of Judah	23	3(+3?)	18
Beer-Sheba Valley	-	-	9?
Beth Shean Valley	43	21	?
Northern Sinai	300	231	?
TOTAL	375	81	353

It is clear from these surveys that in all these regions there was a drastic decline in the number of settlements from the MB II period to the Late Bronze age. In general, the Iron Age I period represents a "return" to about the same number of sites as during the MB II. The notable exception is Ephraim where we see almost a doubling in the number of settlements during the Iron Age I, when compared to the MB II period. During the Late Bronze age, the sites in Ephraim represent only 5 percent of the settlements during the Iron Age I. Considering all the sites from these surveys, the number of Late Bronze Age settlements is only 22 percent of the number in the Middle Bronze period.

Both the surveys and the analysis of urban Canaan during the Late Bronze age, clearly suggest a sharp decline in the settled population of the country, especially in the mountainous regions. On the other hand, the Iron I period shows almost a "return" to the situation of the MB II period, at least when considering the number of sites. It almost seems that there is a cycle which goes from a large settled population (MB II) to a very small settled population (LB), and back to a large number of settlements. Broshi suggested that the size of the Late Bronze population in Canaan was less than half the population of MB II, about 60,000

82. The data is based mainly on the works listed in note 79. This table can be challenged and may need to be adjusted based on the latest surveys. However, it is very doubtful if the proportions and conclusions will be affected significantly.

to 70,000.[83] Finkelstein notes that this cycle from MB II to Iron I is visible especially in the hill country, and he suggests that during the Late Bronze period, when the permanent settlements "fell apart," many of the inhabitants became nomadic. Thus, during the Late Bronze age, the population did not really shrink in half, rather there was a change in the proportion of sedentary dwellers to pastoralist groups, with the pastoralists increasing in numbers. On the other hand, at the end of the 13th century, the socio-economic and political tides turned, and conditions became favorable for groups of pastoralists to settle down, and they settled down.[84]

This explanation is not plausible, as Stager has argued that in "symbiotic relations the pastoral component rarely exceeds 10 to 15 percent of the total population."[85] Also, more importantly, there is no archaeological evidence to support this theory. Faust evaluates the evidence and concludes that "a 'local nomads' theory, which limits the potential origin of the settlers to Cisjordan, is a near impossibility; it practically contradicts the historical and geographical contexts."[86] It is also unclear why, and I think it is unlikely, that the invisible pastoralists of the Late Bronze Age had a good reason to settle down at the end of this period. The archaeological data supports a dramatic increase in numbers which "represents a demographic change that cannot be attributed to natural birthrates, but must reflect a major influx of new population elements."[87]

In this section it is important to briefly address the "Canaanite origins" theory for the emergence of Israel as it represents an attempt to explain the new settlements in the hill country. Without doubt, the most famous and prolific proponent of this theory is William G. Dever.[88]

83. I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), 341.

84. Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement,* 341-346.

85. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 135. He also notes that considering "the decline of sedentarists in Canaan throughout the Late Bronze Age it seems unlikely that most of the Iron Age settlers came from indigenous pastoralist backgrounds." Note also that the assumption that there was a large hill country nomadic populations in the Late Bronze Age is an argument from silence. Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 91, notes that herders would have found their best areas on the coastal plains rather than in the hill country. He also notes the lack of archaeological traces of nomadism from this period.

86. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 178.

87. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*," 136. Note that this reality is also a strong argument against the "Canaanite origins" school." For a strong refutation of the theory that the highlanders were Canaanites see also Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 178-82.

88. See his important work in note 1.

According to him, ancient Israel emerged from the indigenous Canaanite population, which occurred when disaffected Canaanites withdrew to the hill country in "a quest for a new society and new lifestyle. They wanted to start over. And in the end, that was revolutionary."[89] A great problem for this theory has already been mentioned, it cannot explain and account for the dramatic increase of population in the hill country.[90]

An even more important objection to this theory is the lack of explanatory power for the new settlement pattern.[91] According to Dever, the driving force behind these peasants was "land reform,"[92] and he points to other rural revolutionary developments as analogies: the Oneida Community of the 1800s in New York, the community at New Harmony in southwestern Indiana, eighteenth-century Shaker movement etc. He claims that all these and other reformist movements were essentially agrarian and focused essentially on social causes.[93]

The problem is that this explanation is demonstrably false. As Hawkins recently demonstrated, "none of the groups that Dever uses for analogies were motivated by social issues or the ideal of agrarian reform. Instead, they were all founded expressly as *religious* groups, basing their formation on specific biblical concepts."[94] Religion is very important, and the evidence shows that communal groups "appear to typically be

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89. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 178.

90. For a good analysis and refutation of the "peasant's revolt" theory and other indigenous Canaanite versions of that see the work of D. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 265-69. The problems of these theories, including those which resort to ecological explanations (e.g., Thomas L. Thomson) are well presented by Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 4753-4834, Kindle. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 42, also provides an important critique of the "social revolution model."

91. Note also the "explanation" of Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine*, 163, who due to the continuities in material culture speaks of a simple "realignment of Palestinian society." Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, 129, is more convincing when he says that while it cannot be ruled out that some of the city inhabitants settled outside, "the reestablishment of numerous villages far from the former city centers during the twelfth and eleventh centuries can hardly be reasonably understood as a restructuring of the mode of settlement. The difference between the city-states and the village settlements is too great to assume the same population for both." He concludes that the new settlements were the result of a change in the political population, as "they cannot be understood as the continuation of the Late Bronze age city culture." See Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, 135.

92. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 188.

93. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites*, 189.

94. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 47.

motivated by a religious vision." But, it is exactly this "primordial fea-
ture" that most recent interpretations ignore. Hawkins is correct when
he says that trying "to explain early Israelite origins by strictly social or
economic motivations fails to explain the persistent biblical claim that
the earliest Israelites were motivated by a religious vision."[95] Because this
"primordial feature" is so important and neglected, and it is precisely the
most persistent claim for distinctiveness in the biblical tradition, it must
be dealt with in any discussion about Israel's emergence in Canaan.[96]

Religion

Even a superficial reading of the Biblical tradition will reveal that
the Israelites viewed themselves as different from the Canaanites mainly
because of their religion. Thus, despite probable small differences in
dress, house plans, ceramic repertoire, and even language, the Israelites
insist in the Biblical tradition that the main difference is religious.[97]

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95. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 47-8. It is difficult not to see that
most theories about the emergence of Israel reflect very much the "spirit of the
age." A secularized 'peaceful' Western society offers models that largely leave
religion out and tend to downplay the bloody conquest that very likely was part
of the settlement. See for example the recent work of Pekka Pitkänen, "Ancient
Israel and Settler Colonialism," *Settler Colonial Studies,* forthcoming. He makes a
good argument that the Biblical data presents ancient Israel as a "settler colonial
society" with violence and genocide typical of settler colonial processes.

96. Notice also the lack of explanatory power of the indigenous Canaan-
ites theory for Israel's biblical traditions. John J. Bimson, "The Origins of Israel
in Canaan: An Examination of Recent Theories," *Themelios* 15, no. 1 (October
1989): 7, is certainly correct when he says that any "theory which proposes a
picture so different from the biblical one must provide a plausible explanation of
how the biblical picture arose." This point is also made by Hawkins, *How Israel
Became a People*, 42, when he evaluates the "Mendenhall-Gottwald Hypothesis":
"…the Social Revolution Model fails to offer a sufficient explanation for why
the Hebrew Bible gives an account at such variance with the reconstruction of
the theory."

97. Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I," 425, recognizes that "the
Bible faithfully records religious beliefs as the sole feature distinguishing Isra-
elites from Canaanites ." That there should be continuity with the preceding
Canaanite culture in many of the categories listed above is not surprising both
from the biblical perspective (e.g., Deut 6:10-11) and from a logical perspective.
In other words, if the settlers from the highlands were nomads who came from
outside (e.g., a Shasu group as Faust and Hawkins argued above), what kind of
pottery do we expect them to have produced? Notice Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*,
180, note 12: "The 'Canaanite' pottery forms, however, prove nothing . . . .
They were in contact with the Canaanite society throughout the Late Bronze
Age, and these are probably the forms they were familiar with. If these simple

Despite the Biblical claim,[98] reconstructions of early Israel rarely engage with this "primordial feature" that is significant in discussions of ethnicity. With few exceptions,[99] one must go back forty years to the work of Mendenhall[100] to find any sustained discussion about the importance of religion for early Israel. He emphasized the importance of the Yahwistic faith and the concept of a community related to Yahweh by covenant for early Israel:[101]

> Israel was the name of the large social organization that constituted the population ruled by Yahweh, and, as the prophets all pointed out, when it ceased so to be ruled it ceased to have legitimate grounds for corporate existence . . . . [E]arly Israel was the dominion of Yahweh, consisting of all those diverse lineages, clans, individuals, and other social segments that, under the covenant, had accepted the rule of Yahweh and simultaneously rejected the domination of the various local kings and their tutelary deities – the *baalīm*. As a necessary corollary, Yahweh was the one who exclusively exercised the classic functions of the king.

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forms were not seen as meaningful, and they probably were not, there would have been no problem in using them. Moreover, they were probably the only forms the new settlers knew, and they had to use something." Notice also A. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites?" in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 168, who makes a similar point that "the biblical texts make it plain that the Israelites did not have a distinct material culture of their own . . . .The distinction between the Israelites and the Canaanites and other nations was to lie in their behavior and their attitudes to God and other people, rather than in their houses, their tableware, their dress, or their language."

98. Note especially the early poem in Judges 5. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 125, is probably correct when he dates this text to the twelfth century BCE. See also Ex 14 and Dt 32.

99. Note for example the recent work of Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 43. He also agrees with Mendenhall that the emphasis in the Bible is on the Exodus and Sinai covenant as major symbolic expressions of divine aid with which the new highland settlers identified.

100. See George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

101. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 28-9. According to Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 24-25, there was a "biblical revolution" that radically redefined the term religion. This "new concept of religion consisted of man's voluntary submission to the will of God defined in ethical terms that were binding beyond any social or territorial boundary . . . . If the center of old paganism was concern for perpetuating the king's control over all his enemies, the new proclaimed that no one but God was, or could be, in control."

According to Mendenhall, early Israel was a religious community based upon the Sinai covenant, and any attempt to discuss the origins of ancient Israel "must start with, or at least account for, the sudden appearance of a large community in Palestine and Transjordan only a generation after the small group escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. At the same time, it must account for the fact that from the earliest period there is a radical contrast between the religious ideology of Israel and those of the preceding periods and neighboring groups."[102]

Roughly twenty-five years later (1998), Stager also recognized the importance of religion for early Israel. In his view, "Israel developed its self-consciousness in large measure through its religious foundation." This was "a breakthrough that led a subset of Canaanite culture" coming from various backgrounds "to join a supertribe" united under the authority of Yahweh.[103] This Yahweh was revealed to Moses and his origins may be traced to the Midianites. In a sense, Yahwism represented "a radical break with the past and a breakthrough in the history of religions" as the sonship of god was transferred from the pharaoh to the people of Israel who served Yahweh. Thus, it was the constitution of a "people" under the authority of Yahweh that forged a new relationship between deity and community and a new identity for those who participated in this new order.[104]

I find especially useful and relevant Stager's comparison between early Israel as the people (or kindred) of Yahweh and the religious community found in early Islam. Thus, for him "the Israelite *'am* resembles the Islamic *'umma* in that religious allegiance to a single deity . . . required commitment to the larger 'family,' or 'supertribe.'"[105] In Israel there was kinship based on common descent, as the Israelites understood themselves to be the descendants of Jacob, but commitment to the *'am* (people) of Yahweh ranked above tribal affiliation. Israel "was

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102. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 24-5.

103. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 142. D. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel,* 275-76, also discusses the importance of the contract between Yahweh and the human community. He also connects early Israel with the Shasu tribes.

104. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 149. Here he follows the philosopher and social scientist Eric Voegeline. For the connection with the Kenites (a Midianite clan) see also John McLaughlin in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N. Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1402. He thinks that Yahweh "was brought to Canaan by Moses' group of escaped slaves, and eventually took on most of El's characteristics." For evidence that Yahweh was known and worshiped in the deserts south of Canaan in the fourteenth century BCE see more recently Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 3424-3425, Kindle.

105. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 150-51.

a religious federation with allegiance to a single, sovereign patriarch or paterfamilias – Yahweh."[106]

Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, in a useful discussion about Israel's ethnicity in Iron I, is aware about the importance of kinship and religion for a group's origins (they are both "primordial traits").[107] She believes that as early as the reign of Saul, Yahweh-El was the national God, and his worshipers employed "Canaanite" as a "derogatory" appellation for those who worshiped Baal among them. Because the "Israelites" and "Canaanites" shared "a common background and material culture, they would have been indistinguishable archaeologically except in facets of religion."[108]

Unfortunately, Bloch-Smith does not pursue in her work this "primordial ethnic feature." And the same can be said about Avraham Faust. Though he has done an excellent job in debunking the indigenous Canaanite theory for early Israel, and he recognizes that religion "is an important factor that can be used to enhance ethnicity,"[109] he only briefly touches on this when he discusses the Israelite temples.[110]

In a way the reluctance of recent scholars to use religion as a feature for defining and analyzing early Israel is understandable. They may justly argue that there is not enough archaeological data to inquire into the religion of early Israel.[111] To overcome this shortcoming, one has to

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106. Stager, "Forging an Identity," 151.

107. Bloch-Smith, "Israel Ethnicity in Iron I," 403.

108. Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I," 425.

109. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 94.

110. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93, recognizes that the issue of religion "deserves a separate discussion."

111. Note the comment of Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 258-63, Kindle: "[I]t is generally not possible to recover how premonarchic Israel fashioned its own narrative about its religious identity." Beth Alpert-Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religion of Canaan and Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001), 2, is more optimistic as she "seeks to demonstrate that archaeological data provides a strong and independent witness to the religious practices of Canaanites and Israelites in the second to mid-first millennia B.C.E." Gerald A. Klingbeil, "'Between North and South': The Archaeology of Religion in Late Bronze Age Palestine and the Period of Settlement," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 142, says that "cult archaeology at this point cannot prove or disprove the existence or nonexistence of the social entity called Israel," and he reminds us that "the picture of the religious realities of LBA Palestine gleaned from the archaeology of the cult is rather incomplete." Also the focus is on urban centers, therefore more village and archaeological work must be done for a better understanding of the cult.

rely on the early biblical texts (e.g., Judg 5) and also work from (presumably) later texts that seem to reflect the earlier situation.[112] However, for the rest of this essay, special attention will be paid mainly to the archaeological data available from the Late Bronze age and Iron I Canaan. Some archaeological data from Iron II will also be considered, as it is assumed to reflect the earlier situation in Israel. The hope is that the shortcomings in this analysis will be overcome by future discoveries and more extensive examinations of the data.

A good start in the analysis of the religion of early Israel is to compare the Canaanite temples during the Late Bronze Age with those found in the highlands in the early Iron I. Faust discusses this issue in his attempt to establish an egalitarian ethos in early Israel. According to him, even though the Late Bronze Age sites have been excavated only to a small extent, at least one temple was found at almost every site. This is in sharp contrast to Iron Age, when some sites have been excavated to a large extent, and "real temples are practically absent from most sites that can be labeled as Israelite."[113] Even during the Iron Age II, there seems to be a lack of public/organized cult in the Israelite sites, and this "stands in contrast to several villages that, on other grounds, can be identified as Canaanite-Phoenician and exhibit similarity to Bronze Age Canaanite villages, where an organized cult is present."[114]

Millard takes this argument further when he notices the abandonment of the shrines in the towns of the Late Bronze Age. According to him, archaeologists "cannot identify a single site in which worship continued from the LBA well into the Iron Age."[115] Even as one acknowledges that the shift from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age was gradual and it occurred at varying rates in different places, it seems that "no shrine of the Late Bronze Age was still operating by 1000 BC."[116]

112. This is the approach of Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*.

113. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 93-4.

114. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 94. See also Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 5164-67, Kindle, who observes that "with rare exceptions, there are no shrines or temples in the village culture of the Iron Age I highlands" in contrast to the situation in the Late Bronze Age. This suggests to him "a change from the traditional religious worship of the preceding period to a "simple, aniconic, noninstutitionalized cult."

115. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites," 166. As a contrast, according to Beth-Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions,* 152, nearly all the sanctuaries of the LB IA period continued in use from the MB IIC.

116. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites," 166. Beth-Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions*, 176, notices the continuing fortress sanctuary at Shechem, but acknowledges that the other cult centers of Iron I (c. 1200-1000 B.C.) tended to be small and simple, often open air or built among other domestic dwellings. Therefore, these sanctuaries contrast to those of the Late Bronze

In the context in which religious sites are surprisingly tenacious, and a sacred place may persist even if a new religion arises,[117] Millard is correct to note that the "end to the sanctity of a place surely signals a major change in the beliefs of the populace."[118] Even with the limited archaeological data available, it is safe to say that the range of sacred places from the Late Bronze Age ceases during the Iron Age.[119] The following passage from Millard deserves to be quoted in full, as it deals very well with issues raised by the indigenous Canaanites theory.[120]

> If the Canaanites actually moved from the towns into the hill country villages, would they have abandoned the worship of the divinities to which they had been attached when they lived in their cities? This seems unlikely. In fact, they might be expected to redouble their devotions as they faced uncertainties of a new way of life. Furthermore, if the people had come from more than one town which each town having its own patron deity, it is hard to suppose that a new faith would have been accepted almost universally in those villages and at the same time. The cessation of worship at the Late Bronze Age sites, the absence of clear cultic installations in the hill villages, and the rise of the worship of the God of Israel may be pointers to the entry into Canaan of large numbers of a new population, the Israelites.

Should we also take into consideration the "mixed multitude" that is common in many recent reconstructions of early Israel, the problem of 'unity' becomes even more insolvable. For "if people had come from more than one town with each town having its own patron deity," slaves from Egypt and other nomads had come with their own god(s), the expected variety of religions is untraceable in the archaeological record

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Age. She concludes from this that during the Iron I, "much of the Canaanite society reverted to its tribal components. In the absence of cities, worship took place at pilgrimage sites and in small villages." See Beth-Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions*, 215. The clan groups that worshiped at these various sacred sites would later joined together and formed the nation of Israel. Note, however, that temples were the norm in Canaanite communities during both the Middle and Late Bronze periods. And there seems to be "an even distribution of temples between urban and rural sites and across the geographical spectrum." See Daniel Warner, *The Archaeology of the Canaanite Cult*, 227.

117. Warner, *The Archaeology of the Canaanite Cult,* 228, also notes that "Canaanite theology had a strong tradition of the sacredness of where a temple was built. This is demonstrated by the fact that over 50 percent of sites in both the MB and LB period display continuity, i.e., a temple rebuilt on top of its predecessor."

118. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites," 167.

119. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites," 167.

120. Millard, "Were the Israelites Really Canaanites," 167.

and their unity (as it is found in the Merneptah Stela, biblical texts and the material culture) is impossible to sustain. Isn't it more likely that the Yahwistic nucleus came from the outside, was large enough to absorb smaller groups, and had a faith strong enough to at least initially maintain Yahwism as the official/national religion of the early group?[121] It must be the "common devotion to Yahweh that brings coherence to this entire system," as religion has always been a powerful motivator.[122] The Bible attests to Yahwism as the key factor in the formation of early Israel, and there is no viable alternative explanation for why and how the "mixed multitude" in the highlands had the continuity, distinctiveness, and unity reflected in the archaeological record.

Hess goes further in his analysis of Iron Age I cultic sites in the highlands and notes the manner in which these settlers minimize objects related to worship. According to him, "the early Iron Age cult sites are virtually free of any of the expected objects or architecture that customarily identifies religious centers. There are almost no figurines nor are there any distinctive altars or temple/ shrine architecture."[123] In contrast, Warner finds twelve figurines from eighteen temples during the Late Bronze Age, more numerous than during the Middle Bronze Age.[124] With very few exceptions, like the fortress sanctuary at Shechem, the other sanctuaries "tended to be small and simple, often open-air or built among other domestic dwellings."[125] This is again in contrast with the Late Bronze Age.

Conclusion

The cumulative archaeological evidence brought forth most recently by Faust and Hawkins makes it untenable to sustain a theory about early Israel with its roots in the indigenous Canaanite population. The strongest evidence for a non-Canaanite Israel comes from the new settlement patterns, foodways, burial practices, and the cult. There is no

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121. See the conclusion of Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 156-58. He sees the tribes of Israel as bound in a unified "nation" by their shared religious ideology. Others could transfer (e.g., Rahab) their ethnic identification "through the adoption of those ideas – essentially becoming Israelite." Hawkins argues that their ethnic boundaries were generated by ideology, an ideology that allowed for the inclusion of those foreigners who embraced Yahwism.

122. Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*, 279-80.

123. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 5171-74, Kindle.

124. Warner, *The Archaeology of the Canaanite Cult,* 241. There were also more altars found than during the Middle Bronze Age. To my knowledge, there were no altars found in any Iron Age I site in the highland villages.

125. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 5233-35, Kindle.

doubt that more works need to be done in all of these areas. However, if we are to understand and describe ancient Israel in its own terms, and not as a modern construct, the focus should be on its religion. That is certainly the most primordial trait that Israel remembers as being different from the Canaanites and it was what united the "mixed multitude" found on the pages of the Bible. It may be that not much will be found in this area, but at least scholars will be looking in the right place to establish Israel's distinctiveness. Also, for the reconstruction of ancient Israel more attention should be paid to the possibility that there was an actual conquest or, at least, that (many) people were actually killed as the decrease in population suggests.[126] One cannot help but notice that at this stage of research reconstructed Israel looks very much like a mirror of modern western society: secularized and peaceful (hence most propose a peaceful infiltration). Unfortunately, the ancient reality contradicts this view as both religion and warfare were very much part of everyday life.

126. See more recently the relevant observations of Hawkins, *Ancient Israel*, 74-75, about pastoral nomads in almost all the sources as being violent and dangerous. According to literary sources, the reality in the ancient world "was that almost all interactions between states and nomadic groups were said to be military in nature." See also the work of Pitkänen in note 94.