

Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books of Samuel

Edited by
STEPHEN GERMANY
and BENEDIKT HENSEL

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Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books of Samuel

Textual and Historical Approaches

Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times VIII

Edited by

Stephen Germany and Benedikt Hensel

Mohr Siebeck

STEPHEN GERMANY, born 1985; 2016 PhD (Emory University); 2023 Habilitation (University of Basel); Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible in its Historical and Cultural Contexts at the University of Lausanne.

orcid.org/0000-0002-7259-2063

BENEDIKT HENSEL, born 1979; 2011 PhD; 2016 Habilitation; 2019-21 positions as Interim Professor of Hebrew Bible and Biblical Archaeology at the universities of Mainz and Zurich; Full Professor of Hebrew Bible at Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg and Co-Director of the Hazor excavations/Israel.

orcid.org/0000-0001-6608-2676

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Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, Wilhelmstraße 18, 72074 Tübingen, Germany
www.mohrsiebeck.com, info@mohrsiebeck.com

Preface

The books of Samuel, which narrate the beginning of kingship in Israel and the reigns of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, are replete with references to groups and individuals from areas in the geographic vicinity of ancient Israel and Judah, including, among others, Philistines, Ammonites, Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites, Arameans, Gileadites, and Gibeonites. While the biblical narrative portrays Saul and/or David as interacting with all of these groups and with individual members of the latter, the question arises to what extent historical conditions from later periods in Israel and Judah might be reflected and evaluated through the literary representation of such interactions already during the reigns of Israel's founding kings, Saul and David.

The contributions in this volume present a variety of case studies dealing with the representation of interactions between Israel (and especially its first two kings, Saul and David) and neighboring groups both within the world of the narrative and in relation to the historical circumstances presupposed by the narrative's authors. Many of the contributions were first presented as papers at the conference "The Book of Samuel in the Shadow of Empires: Relations between Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Nations in Historical, Compositional, and Theological Perspective", held at the University of Basel on October 12–14, 2022 with the financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. These contributions have been supplemented with additional studies that address the topic at hand from various perspectives, some of which have been published previously in other contexts, while others have been written specifically for this volume. Rather than constituting a comprehensive "handbook" on the representation of every neighboring group of Israel and Judah mentioned in the books of Samuel, the contributions in this volume reflect a snapshot of scholarship on the books of Samuel in the early 2020s and the diversity of approaches existing at the interface of literary analysis, history, and archaeology.

We would like to offer our thanks to all of the authors for their contributions to the volume and for the stimulating discussion that arose both at the conference in Basel and in the process of revising the contributions for publication. We would also like to thank Anita Dimberger, Nora Hurter, Damaris Zaugg, Joris Krapf, and Michael Klaiber for their outstanding help with the organization and practical logistics of the conference in Basel and with the formatting of the present volume. Finally, we wish to extend our gratitude to the editors of the RIAB series for accepting the volume for publication, to the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck for their support in preparing the volume, and to the Swiss National Science Foundation, which provided the financial support for the Open Access publication of the volume.

Lausanne and Oldenburg, January 2025

Stephen Germany
Benedikt Hensel

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	IX
<i>Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany</i>	
Introduction	1
<i>Aren Maeir</i>	
On Defining Israel: Or, Let's do the <i>Kulturkreislehre</i> Again!	9
<i>Hannes Bezzel</i>	
Who are the Philistines in the Books of Samuel?	47
<i>Ann E. Killebrew</i>	
The Philistines in the Books of Samuel: An Archaeological Perspective	59
<i>John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold</i>	
Tradents of the Lost Ark: The Ark of the Covenant as an Object of Discourse on Divine and Human Kingship	89
<i>Jürg Hutzli</i>	
Proximity to David, Proximity to Yhwh: Foreigners in the David Narratives	111
<i>Cynthia Edenburg</i>	
In Search of Amalek: The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30.....	129
<i>Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef</i>	
Copper, Nomads, and Kings: Rethinking the Social and Historical Background of the Books of Samuel.....	151
<i>Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman</i>	
Arameans in the Books of Samuel: Literary, Historical, and Archaeological Perspectives	171
<i>Walter Bühner</i>	
The Long Shadow of the Gibeonites in the Account of Saul's post-mortem Rejection and Restitution (2 Sam 21:1–14)	207
<i>Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany</i>	
Shifting Trends in the Study of Non-Israelite Groups in the Books of Samuel	221

List of Contributors 229

Index of Sources 231

Index of Modern Authors 241

Index of Subjects 243

List of Abbreviations

Ä&L	Ägypten und Levante
AASF.B	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Bulletin
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ACEBT	<i>Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie</i>
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
ANES	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ARA	Annual Reviews in Anthropology
ARAM	<i>Aram, Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies</i>
ATD	Altes Testament Deutsch
ATDan	Acta Theologica Danica
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
BE	Biblische Enzyklopädie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibEnc	Biblical Encyclopedia
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BMes	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BTAVO	Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orient
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> (ed. W.W. Hallo; 4 vols.; Leiden 1997–2017)
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DÖAW	Denkschriften. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
ErIsr	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
HACL	History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HeBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
JARE	<i>Journal of Archaeological Research</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBTh	<i>Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie</i>
JHNES	The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JJTP	<i>Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAI	H. Donner/W. Röllig, <i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i> (Wiesbaden 2002)
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LAS	Leipziger altorientalische Studien
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NBL	<i>Neues Bibel-Lexikon</i> (ed. M. Görg; 3 vols.; Zürich, 1991–2001)
NCB	New Century Bible
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> (ed. E. Stern; 4 vols.; Jerusalem 1993)
NEchtB	Neuer Echter Bibel
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta

ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PdÄ	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RIAB	Research on Aram and Israel in Biblical Times
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SBAB.AT	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände, Altes Testament
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLStBL	SBL Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SHAJ	Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StPohl	Studia Pohl
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>ThQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>ThWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> (ed. G.J. Botterweck/H. Ringgren; Stuttgart 1970)
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UTB	Universitätsaschenbücher
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WANEM	Worlds of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean
WAW	SBL Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
ZAR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBKAT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare Altes Testament
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Introduction

Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany

The aim of the present volume is to investigate the portrayal of Israel's and Judah's relations with neighboring groups in the books of Samuel from both literary and historical perspectives. Many of the contributions in the volume were first presented as papers at the conference "The Book of Samuel in the Shadow of Empires: Relations between Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Nations in Historical, Compositional, and Theological Perspective", held at the University of Basel on October 12–14, 2022 with the financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. These contributions have been supplemented with additional studies that address the topic at hand from various perspectives, some of which have been published previously in other contexts (see the contributions by Aren Maeir and Jürg Hutzli), while others have been written specifically for this volume (see the contribution by John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold as well as the contribution by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman).

Two major questions that this volume seeks to address are: (1) What is the relationship between the depiction of population groups neighboring Israel in the world of the text and relations between Israel, Judah, and other populations and polities (including major empires) in the world in which the narratives in Samuel were composed? (2) How can the latest historical and archaeological evidence pertaining to the various neighboring population groups in the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE be related to the rhetorical aims of the books of Samuel? In short, closer investigation of the representation of neighboring groups in the books of Samuel from the multiple perspectives of narrative structure, ideological content, compositional development, and extrabiblical evidence facilitates understanding the historical background and literary history of the books of Samuel more broadly.

In order to reach a historically sound interpretation of the books of Samuel, it is crucial to distinguish clearly between different levels of interpretation and methodological approaches. The discussion involves various levels of analysis – biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology – which have not always been adequately distinguished from each other in previous research. The contributions in this volume reflect the distinct areas of expertise of their authors (above all textual analysis and archaeology, respectively), and at certain points, the historical conclusions reached by text-focused scholars on the one hand and by archaeologists on the other are not easily reconciled. This tension is not necessarily a bad thing, however, as it cautions against overly simplistic assumptions, such as the idea that the antiquity of the narratives in Samuel finds clear confirmation in the archaeological evidence, or, conversely, the idea that the narratives are purely a reflection of later times and do not reflect any received knowledge about the early monarchic period in Israel.

Certain contributions in this volume can be read in tandem with each other, providing different perspectives on a single question, such as the historical background(s) underlying the portrayal of the Philistines in the books of Samuel (see the contributions relating to the Philistines by Hannes Bezzel, Ann Killebrew, and John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold). Others lack dialogue partners within the volume itself but are nevertheless embedded in current scholarly debates at the intersection of literary analysis and archaeology (see the contribution on Edom by Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef and the contribution on Amalek by Cynthia Edenburg). Yet others seek to open up a dialogue between textual analysis and archaeological research within a single study (see the contribution on Aram by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman) or focus specifically on textual analysis (see the contribution on the Gibeonites by Walter Bühner), pointing to the potential for further historically-oriented research on the depiction of specific groups in the books of Samuel.

The opening contribution by *Aren M. Maeir*, “On Defining Israel: Or, Let’s do the *Kulturkreislehre* Again!”, offers a theoretical and critical frame for the historical reconstruction of ethnic groups in antiquity. He begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis for the study of archaeological correlates of identity, providing a brief sketch of the dominant view in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that there was a direct link between discrete archaeological assemblages and distinct human groups (the “pots equals peoples” theory) and its critique beginning in the mid-twentieth century with the advent of New Archaeology. It was only later, beginning in the 1980s, that theoretical research on ethnicity began to make its mark in archaeology, yet in Levantine archaeology, as Maeir notes, engagement with such theory remains superficial, and in practice many Levantine archaeologists continue to equate ethnicity with material culture. On the basis of recent research on ethnicity, Maeir reiterates that culture and ethnicity do not overlap, and that, to the extent that identifying ethnicity in the archaeological record is possible at all, one should compare *practices* between groups rather than objects themselves. In the second main part of the essay (part 3, Israel in Extra-Biblical Iron Age Texts), Maeir emphasizes that, with regard to antiquity, “identifications of ethnic and other identity groups are almost always based on textual information. [...] Given that the biblical texts may very well reflect later ideologies and seek to backdate the origin of a group identity, and the large lacunae in the mention of Israel in other texts, extreme caution is called for when offering hypotheses about who and what Israel was, and what ancient populations can be archaeologically identified with this group” (p. 23). The same can be said – *mutatis mutandi* – for other (ethnic) groups mentioned in the biblical texts and other ancient sources. As an alternative way forward, Maeir “propose[s] that a major focus of future studies of the various stages of Iron Age Israel and related cultures and groups, place a strong emphasis on the study of group-specific technological praxis. This includes analyses of a broad range of facets of societal technology, such as pottery production, food preparation and consumption, building methods, metallurgy, and coroplastic (figurine) production” (p. 31). Given the aim of the present volume to illuminate the interplay between historical circumstances and the textual representation of Israel’s neighbors in the books of Samuel, Maeir’s concluding programmatic statement poses a challenge to the synthesis of archaeological and textual data: “Let us set aside grand narratives of large entities and instead

concentrate on the lived lives of local communities of practice and belonging that comprised Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. To define what Israel was, and how it developed over time, we should focus on what people did, based on archaeologically observable evidence” (p. 32).

The contribution by Hannes Bezzel, “Who Are the Philistines in the Books of Samuel?”, deals with the question of which group(s) – and in which geographical area(s) – are in view in the portrayal of the Philistines in the books of Samuel. Bezzel begins by critiquing the circular reasoning of the “Philistine Paradigm” in which the biblical narratives about the Philistines (especially in Samuel) have been used to explain the archaeological evidence, which is then used once again to explain the biblical texts. Bezzel argues that this paradigm can be called into question both on the basis of recent archaeological research and on the basis of diachronic analysis of the biblical texts. At the same time, he moves away from his own earlier position that the Saul-David narrative as a whole dates to the late eighth century, now suggesting that “the equation of the literary Philistines with the historical Assyrians on every redaction-historical level appears to be a little too simplistic” (p. 52). Rather, Bezzel argues that the oldest references to the Philistines in the books of Samuel reflect “no specific historical ethnic or political group” but instead “represent the oppressive enemy as such” (p. 55); only later did they come to be associated with the inhabitants of the southern coastal plain and implicitly compared with the Assyrians.

The contribution by Ann Killebrew, “The Philistines in the Book of Samuel: An Archaeological Perspective” provides an overview of the current archaeological evidence from six sites commonly identified as Philistine: Ekron, Ashdod, Tell es-Safi/Gath, Ashkelon, Tel Batash, and Tell Qasile. Killebrew reviews the material culture evidence from these sites during the late Iron I and Iron II periods “in order to respond to questions about the historical backdrop and literary history of the books of Samuel” (p. 59). Following her survey of the archaeological evidence, Killebrew stresses that the Iron Age I is the only period of time when all four of the excavated “Pentapolis” sites (Ekron, Ashdod, Tell es-Safi/Gath, and Ashkelon) were major urban centers. On the basis of the appearance of Philistine material culture at Tel Batash/Timnah and Tell Qasile beginning in the Iron IB, she further concludes, “These findings suggest the expansion of Philistine influence beyond the original core settlements, and they tally with the biblical account in the books of Judges and Samuel of Philistine superiority over Judah” (p. 85). Moreover, Killebrew suggests a correlation between the narratives of David’s victories over the Philistines (2 Sam 5; 8) and evidence for the decline of certain Philistine sites during Iron IIA, especially Tel Mique-Ekron, Tel Batash, and Tel Qasile, but possibly also Ashdod and Ashkelon. While the fluctuation in settlement at the six sites discussed by Killebrew may be uncontroversial, the question arises for interpreters of the books of Samuel: Is it merely a coincidence that 2 Samuel places David’s defeat of the Philistines roughly in the same historical period that the decline of multiple presumed Philistine sites is attested? Or did the authors of the Philistine passages in Samuel have access to some sort of knowledge of this “apex” (whether connected to traditions about David from the outset or only later linked with him)? On the other hand, caution is advised here, since the framing of the archaeological evidence in Killebrew’s survey follows precisely the “vicious circle” that Bezzel warns of in his

essay: “The text served as the basis for a historical reconstruction which was taken as a matrix for interpreting archaeological findings which, reciprocally, were used to confirm the supposed historical reliability of the biblical account” (p. 48).

In their contribution “Tradents of the Lost Ark: The Ark of the Covenant as an Object of Discourse on Divine and Human Kingship”, John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold make an innovative contribution to the interpretation of the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 by focusing on the motif of divine kingship. Following a review of both earlier and recent views on the literary development and rhetorical function of the Ark Narrative, Rice and Bächtold emphasize that the later, expanded version of the narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 cast the ark “as a symbol of a lost era of self-determination within discussions of a future self-determination taking place in many texts across the Hebrew Bible” (p. 95). In contrast to earlier scholarship on the Ark Narrative, which followed Rost in regarding the text as an originally independent “source”, Rice and Bächtold emphasize that the narrative, “is most likely a product of its current literary context leading to the institution of the Israelite monarchy” (p. 98). In addition, they show how the authors of several different biblical texts used the “social availability” of the ark to advance their own views about the nature of prophecy, priesthood, and human kingship (part 4). In the last part of the study, they theorize the ark in terms of the poet Charles Baudelaire’s idea of *malentendu universel* (universal misunderstanding), concluding that “it is the looseness of the ark that gave it its impact and turned it into one of the main symbols of nationhood in post-monarchic contexts” (p. 105).

The contribution by Jürg Hutzli, “Proximity to David, Proximity to Yahweh: Foreigners in the David Narratives”, takes a literary approach to the portrayal of non-Israelites in the books of Samuel. He argues that the frequent reference to the place of origin of many of the characters mentioned in Samuel is intentional: In many cases, non-Israelite characters are depicted positively, thus standing in contrast to the negative Deuteronomistic image of foreign nations. Hutzli observes that the prominent place that individual foreigners hold in the David narratives is reminiscent of the “foreigner-friendly” perspective of the book of Ruth. Notably, the books of Samuel refer to foreigners swearing by Yhwh, turning to Yhwh in times of need, handling the ark of Yhwh competently, or having a Yhwh-theophoric name. On the basis of this evidence, Hutzli argues that the books of Samuel presuppose a custom whereby foreigners residing in Israel recognize Yhwh as the “god of the land” and turn to him, for example, in times of need. In Hutzli’s view, many of the passages in Samuel featuring foreign individuals date to the preexilic period. This relatively early dating of the narratives rests in part on the argument that narratives mentioning the city of Gath reflect historical circumstances prior to the destruction of Gath in the ninth century and likely would not have featured this city if they had been written later. However, the fact that these passages share a perspective similar to that found in the book of Ruth raises the question of whether they may be better understood as reactions *against* a Deuteronomistic ideology rather than as early texts that predate this ideology.

The contribution by Cynthia Edenburg, “In Search of Amalek: The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30”, raises the question whether the passages in the books of Samuel mentioning Amalek and Amalekites may be a cipher for Persian-period Idumea rather than references to an Iron Age nomadic group. She takes 1 Sam 30 as a

case study, beginning with linguistic observations that lend support to a late dating of the chapter (part 3), from which she concludes that “the scribe who penned the narrative attempted to emulate the style of oral storytelling, but ultimately left tell-tale signs of the scribal erudition of the Persian period” (p. 138). She then turns to a broader discussion of the literary portrayal of Amalek in the books of Samuel as a whole (part 4), where she notes that “[p]erhaps the most striking feature in the biblical profile of Amalek is the lack of ambivalence towards them on the part of the biblical scribes, in sharp contrast to Edom, Midian, or the Kenites” (p. 139). While other scholars have suggested that Amalek was a “blanket name” for the tribal groups of the southern desert or as a cipher for first-millennium BCE Arabs, Edenburg asks why such groups would evoke such hostility on the part of the biblical scribes and thus considers whether certain details in the narrative might better fit another group. Edenburg notes that Judean hegemony in the southern Hebron hills and the Negev began to wane at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, thus disrupting the equilibrium between different groups in the northern Negev and leading to competition between pastoralists and the settled population for access to arable land. For Edenburg, the geographic sphere of the Amalek narrative in 1 Sam 30 provides the key for identifying the group behind the term “Amalek”: After the Babylonian conquest, the southern Hebron hills and the Negev were no longer controlled by Judah and ultimately became the province of Idumea in the Hellenistic period. In the end, Edenburg proposes two alternative scenarios for the composition of the account of David’s battle with the Amalekites in 1 Sam 30. In the first scenario, the story would have originally been a “legal midrash explicating the origin of the custom for distributing war booty” (p. 146), and the identification of the raiders with Amalek would be part of a late reworking that gave the story an anti-Idumean slant. In the second scenario, this “legal midrash” would have been associated with Amalek from the outset and was motivated “by the wish to reverse the hold of Idumea upon what used to be southern Judah” (p. 146), retrojecting this wish onto Judah’s founding figure.

The contribution by Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef, “Copper, Nomads, and Kings: Rethinking the Social and Historical Background of the Book of Samuel”, focuses on the problem that not all complex hierarchical societies are readily identifiable in the archaeological record. The study is divided into two distinct parts. In the first main part (sections 2–3), Thomas and Ben-Yosef make the case for the existence of an Edomite polity during the tenth century BCE on the basis of archaeological evidence and extrabiblical texts (the reference to Shasu tribes in Papyrus Anastasi VI and the Nimrud Slab of Adad-Nirari III). In doing so, they identify the workers involved in copper smelting at the southern Arabah site of Timna with the Shasu and note that “the society responsible for this early Iron Age copper industry can only have been tent-dwelling pastoral nomads” (p. 157). They identify this polity with Edom, critiquing in detail the questioning of such an identification by Piotr Bienkowski (and in doing so rely in part on biblical texts such as 1 Kgs 9:16; Num 34:3; and Josh 15:1). In the second main part (section 4), the authors argue that biblical scholars should take seriously a reading of the books of Samuel “against the background of a socially polymorphous Israel during the early Iron Age” (p. 160) and provide four case studies of how such a background affects the reading of particular passages in Samuel. They propose (1)

understanding the reports of Saul's and David's defeat of Edom in 1 Sam 14:47 and 2 Sam 8:12–14 as reflecting these kings' desire to control the supply and trade of copper; (2) understanding certain instances of the term עִיר in Samuel as referring to a social unit dwelling in a tent camp rather than a built-up city; (3) interpreting the term מִדְּבָר against the background of pastoral nomadism rather than as a term designating the fringes of civilization; and (4) interpreting the references to Shiloh in 1 Sam 1–4 as reflecting a tent-shrine that would fit within the pastoral-nomadic social structure of early Israel. In sum, the authors use recent archaeological evidence for a largely “invisible” complex society that they identify as Edom as the starting point for the thesis that certain details in the books of Samuel relating to Edom and early Israelite social structure as historically reliable.

The contribution by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman, “Arameans in the Book of Samuel: Textual, Historical, and Archaeological Approaches”, inquires into the historical background of multiple passages in the books of Samuel in which “Aram” (i.e., Damascus) and/or other Aramean groups or polities are mentioned (or potentially mentioned). The first part of the study consists of a textual analysis of the passages in Samuel in which Arameans are either mentioned explicitly or potentially implied, including an evaluation of the relative dating of these passages within the compositional history of the books of Samuel. The second part of the study considers extrabiblical textual evidence relevant to contextualizing the aforementioned references historically, and it reinforces the conclusion that the texts reflect knowledge of historical circumstances from well after the time depicted in the narratives, namely, the second half of the ninth century at the earliest and possibly extending down to the Persian period. The third part of the study reviews the archaeological data for the settlement history of the central Levant during the early first millennium BCE and places a special focus on the Sea of Galilee region. Both extrabiblical texts and the archaeological evidence from the Sea of Galilee region suggest that the authors of the books of Samuel had access to knowledge about the region extending back to the late ninth century (but likely not earlier) and knowledge of an inhabited Sea of Galilee region as late as the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Parallel to this, the analysis of the biblical texts themselves suggests that the specific passages in Samuel referring to Arameans were composed sometime between the late eighth century and the Persian period. In order to account for the difference between the *terminus post quem* suggested by the extrabiblical evidence and that suggested by the biblical texts themselves, one is almost inevitably faced with the necessity of postulating the reception of earlier “traditions” in the passages in question. Yet contrary to earlier scholarship, which would regard these as traditions about David, a more parsimonious conclusion would be that the authors of Samuel had access to fragments of information (such as from Neo-Assyrian annals or copies of inscriptions from neighboring regions).

The contribution by Walter Bühner, “The Long Shadow of the Gibeonites in the Account of Saul's Post-mortem Rejection and Restitution (2 Sam 21:1–14)”, addresses the role of the Gibeonites, who are portrayed as non-Israelites residing within the boundaries of Israel, in the books of Samuel. In contrast to other recent analyses of the story relating to Saul's bloodguilt in 2 Sam 21:1–14, Bühner concludes that the story is largely a compositional unity, with only isolated later additions in vv. 2b–3aa, 7, 12aβb–

13a. On the basis of this diachronic analysis, Bühner finds the hypothesis that the “bloodguilt of the house of Saul” originally meant the “bloodguilt *against* the house of Saul” (H. Bezzel) unconvincing. Rather, the “bloodguilt of the house of Saul” was bloodguilt against the Gibeonites from the outset. Yet the Gibeonites’ demand to David to kill seven descendants of Saul and to deny them a proper burial as recompense creates a new violation of the social order: the failure to honor the dead. As Bühner points out, “The post-mortem destruction of the killed Saulides aims at the radical erasure of the memory of Saul. By not only killing his descendants and thus preventing them from commemorating their father and grandfather, but also preventing them from being remembered themselves, the Gibeonites aim at a complete *damnatio memoriae* for Saul’s family. Following the execution, Rizpah’s wake over the bodies of the murdered Saulides makes David realize that Saul himself is still not buried in his family tomb, leading David to transfer Saul’s bones from Jabesh-gilead to the land of Benjamin.

The final contribution by Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany, “Shifting Trends in the Study of Non-Israelite Groups in the Books of Samuel”, provides a wider context for the preceding contributions in the volume by briefly reviewing the current state of research on the portrayal of non-Israelite groups in the books of Samuel, especially with regard to the hypothesized historical context(s) in which the various literary strata of these books were written.

On Defining Israel: Or, Let's do the *Kulturkreislehre* Again!*

Aren Maeir

1. Introduction

If the scope of archaeological research is to obtain an insight into the identity constructions of Iron Age people as suggested by the material evidence, then we need not to be fixed on one particular type of identity, which may or may not be actually present in the archaeological record, but rather allow for all possible scenarios to unfold and pick the one(s) that seem(s) most plausible. This implies a 180° turn in the relationship between identity concepts and the material record. One should not categorize the material record based on some large (ethnic) identities that we assume people shared, but rather reconstruct past identities based on the material record patterns.¹

While the opening quote seems to fit in perfectly with some of the conundrums of the archaeological definition of identity in the Iron Age Levant, and in particular of ancient Israel, in fact it is directed at quite a different period and cultures (early medieval Europe). Clearly, the issues discussed in this article are not only relevant to the study of ancient Israel. Rather, critical perspectives from the broader contexts of archaeological research are of importance in attempts to archaeologically define early Israel.²

But why do we need another discussion on archeologically defining early Israel? Can an archaeological perspective help discussions like those in this issue on the question of a “big” and “little” Israel?

Both questions can be answered with “Yes”. It appears that we do indeed need to bring up these issues again, though perhaps from a slightly different angle. As I will try to demonstrate below, much of the discussion, archaeological and textual, on the definition of “early Israel” in general, and of the formation and meaning of the term “Israel”, is wrought with serious theoretical and methodological problems.

To do so, I will step back and consider the question primarily from an archaeological perspective. But I will not simply reiterate well-known criteria from the material record that have been used frequently in previous studies. Rather, I will consider them through a critical theoretical lens. As such, my data set will not be limited to what is usually used for defining ancient Israel. I will also adduce relevant scholarship from the study

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¹ Popa 2018, 191.

² As used in this contribution, “Israel” can refer to several things. 1) Specific mentions of the name Israel in ancient sources; 2) The commonly used generic term for the population of the southern Levantine central hills region (often “Ancient Israel”); 3) “Big” and “Little” Israel, following Monroe/Fleming 2019, referring to the changing meaning of the term Israel during the Iron Age. As needed, the specific use will be noted.

of identity of other ancient cultures and contexts, where many of the same problems are being grappled with.

In doing so, I realize that I am entering a minefield. Archaeologists and historians who write about ancient Israel have focused on the five Ws (who, where, when, why and what). These, indeed, are the essential questions, and the axes of complex debates in the field. What I have to offer will not resolve these disagreements. Neither do I claim that the theoretical perspectives I bring here are entirely unknown to my colleagues, some of whom, indeed, refer to them in their work. But I maintain that they have insufficiently informed work in the field; indeed, in the work of many scholars of ancient Israel they play no role at all.³ Clearly, to define (and identify) what ancient Israel is, at different stages, requires, as a precondition, some common ground in the field not only on what the term “Israel” refers to, but also on how it is manifested in the archaeological record, both at specific points in time and over extended periods.

By and large, archaeologists and historians in the field fall into the same trap. When thinking of ancient Israel, they picture it in a manner according with their intuition of what it should look like. Usually, the image comes from an Israel of a very specific socio-historical timeframe. They then project this image backwards and forwards, most often flattening the developmental processes and the temporal and situational diversity of how this Israel is manifested in the material record.

Even given the premise that there was a group (or groups) consisting of people with a common identity that they, or others, defined as “Israel” in some form or another, at different stages of history (from that term’s first appearance c. 1210 BCE on the Merenptah Stele to modern times), the referent it points to was neither static nor one that underwent a simplistic, uniform and linear development. Richard Jenkins puts it in a nutshell: Identity, he writes, “is a process – identification – not a ‘thing’. It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does.”⁴

In other words, the meaning of the term “Israel”, denoting a group with a common identity, has always been in flux, taking on very different characters over time. Furthermore, the nature of its permutations is complex. That means that any presumption that the term can be simplistically defined by reference to specific definitions, characteristics, continuities, and developmental pathways is untenable. For example, the entities referred to as “Little Israel” and “Big Israel” in the recent scholarly discussion are not simply a physical development of each other, but are connected to complex ideological viewpoints, both in antiquity and in modern interpretations. Thus, from an archaeological perspective, a straightforward developmental continuity of the material correlates of various stages of Israel may be very difficult, if even impossible, to define. Indeed, there may not be any such thing.

³ I am hardly the first to question the theoretical foundations of a substantial part of the discussions on the definitions of early Israel, in particular in relationship to the definition of ethnicity and its archaeological manifestations. See, e. g., Kletter 2006; Kletter 2014; Lemche 2010; Lemche 2012; Nestor 2010. It is crucial to continue pointing this out due to the fact that these theoretical misconceptions can still be seen in seemingly influential publications (e.g., Dever 2017, 210–218; Faust 2018).

⁴ Jenkins 2008, 5. See as well, e.g., Melucci 1982, 68; Schlesinger 1987, 237. For a review of concepts of identity in connection with early Israel, see Töyräänvuori 2020, 205–215.

Index of Sources

Hebrew Bible

Genesis

4:10	215
10:23	187, 190
14:7	138 ₅₃ , 140
15:15	216 ₄₇
15:19	140 ₅₉
23:8	121 ₄₄
24:10	141 ₇₁
25	139 ₅₉
25:8	216 ₄₇
25:17	216 ₄₇
26:34	121 ₄₄
27	139 ₅₉
28–31	180, 181 ₂₅
28	197
28:20–22	181, 181 ₃₅
28:21	181
30:33	181
31:19–39	181, 181 ₃₄
32	139 ₅₉
32:3	153
32:18	136
32:26	209 ₁₀
35:29	216 ₄₇
36:9–12	140
36:12, 16	138 ₅₃ , 139–140, 145, 160
36:21	153
36:31–39	153, 153 ₇
36:41	153
37:19–20	120 ₃₈
42:10–11	120 ₃₈
42:21	120 ₃₈
47:6	136
47:30	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
49:29	216 ₄₇ , 216 ₄₉
49:33	216 ₄₇

Exodus

2:15–4:19	140 ₅₉
3:20	97
17	138 ₅₃ , 140
17:8–16	139 ₅₄ , 140, 140 ₆₄

17:8	160
17:14	140
17:16	133
18:1–12	123
18:1–27	140 ₅₉
19	140
23:14	137 ₄₇
23:19	140 ₆₁
23:33	116 ₂₅
25–40	89
28	103 ₇₉
33:2	116
34:11	116
32:12	116 ₂₅
40:20–21	102

Leviticus

22:27	136
24:10	114 ₁₄

Numbers

3:31	102
13:19	162
13:29	138 ₅₃ , 140, 160
14:25	138 ₅₃ , 140
14:43	138 ₅₃ , 140
14:45	138 ₅₃ , 140
15:23	136
17:4	136
20:14	139 ₅₉ , 153
20:16	158
20:24	216 ₄₇
24:17–19	140
24:20–22	139
24:20–24	140 ₆₀
24:20	140
25:4	209
27:13	216 ₄₇
31:2	216 ₄₇
31:3–11	139 ₅₉
33	140
33:5	135

33:14	140	12:5	180–181, 181 ₃₆ , 182
33:40	140	12:9–24	134
33:44	153	13:2–3	60
34	158	13:2	175–176 ₁₇ , 180, 182
34:3	5, 158	13:3	49, 58, 113 ₉
35:30–34	216 ₄₃	13:9–14	182 ₃₇
35:33–34	215	13:11	175 ₁₇ , 180–182
		13:13	175 ₁₇ , 180, 182 ₃₈ , 196
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		15	143–144, 158
1:2	159	15:1	5, 158
1:44	159	15:10–11	79
2:4	139 ₅₉	15:21–58	133–134
3	182 ₃₇ , 182 ₄₁	15:21–32	142
3:14	180–181, 181 ₃₆ , 182	15:22	142 ₇₇
7:1–2	208	15:30	142 ₇₇
7:1	116	15:31	142 ₇₇
7:16	116 ₂₅	15:42	142 ₇₇
7:25	116 ₂₅	15:48	142 ₇₇
16–17	99	15:50	142 ₇₇
17:14–20	95, 99	15:54	142 ₇₇
20:16–18	208	15:55	142 ₇₇
20:17	116	15:61–62	164
22:21	130 ₈	16:2	113
22:24	130 ₈	19	144
23:8	139 ₅₉	19:1–9	142
25:17–19	139 ₅₄ , 140, 140 ₆₁	19:2–8	133–134
25:17	138 ₅₃	19:4	134, 142 ₇₇
25:19	133, 138 ₅₃ , 140	19:5	142 ₇₇
26:1–15	140 ₆₁	19:7	142 ₇₇
26:16–19	140 ₆₁	19:8	142 ₇₇
28:26	216 ₄₄	19:35	190
28:54	135	23:12	116 ₂₅
31:16–17	96		
31:16	216 ₄₈	<i>Judges</i>	
32:50	216 ₄₇	1:1–2	130 ₉
33:2	159	1:16	140 ₅₉
		2:3	116 ₂₅
<i>Joshua</i>		2:10	212 ₄₇
2	123	3:13	138 ₅₃ , 139 ₅₈ , 140
3–4	102	3:31	47
3:10	116	4:11	140 ₅₉
6	102	5:4	153
7:14–18	163	5:14	138 ₅₃ , 139 ₅₈
7:25	130 ₈	6:1–8:28	139 ₅₉
9	112, 208, 211 _{18–19} , 222	6:3	138 ₅₃ , 139, 139 ₅₈ , 140
9:3, 17	208 ₆	6:33	138 ₅₃ , 139, 139 ₅₈ , 140
9:15	211 ₁₈	7:12	138 ₅₃ , 139, 139 ₅₈ , 140
9:21, 23, 27	211 ₁₈	8:32	216 ₄₉
10:1–12, 41	208 ₆	9:33	135
11:6–7	159	9:44	135
11:19	208 ₆	10:12	138 ₅₃ , 140

11	179 ₃₀	8	99
11:3, 5	186	8:5	221
11:17	153	9	178
12:15	138 ₅₃ , 139 ₅₈ , 140	9:11–13	120 ₃₈
13:1	97	9:16	208 ₇
14–15	79	10	99 ₆₀
15:19	136	10:27	135 ₃₇
16:31	216 ₄₉	11	51, 179, 179 ₃₀
17:7–10	130 ₉	13–14	51–52, 221
18:25	130 ₈	13	208
19:16, 18	130 ₉	13:3	58
20:18	130 ₉	13:5	47
20:37	135	13:6–14	139
21:19	130 ₉	13:13–14	208
		13:19–21	60
<i>1 Samuel</i>		13:19–22	52
1–7	99	14	208 ₄
1	51	14:41	122
1:3	130 ₉	14:47–52	139
1:17	122	14:47–48	152
2	92, 92 ₁₄ , 96, 101	14:47	6, 162, 214 ₃₄ , 223
3	51	14:48	138 ₅₃ , 139–140
4	51–52, 91, 92 ₁₄ , 92 ₁₅ , 93– 95, 99, 101, 122	14:49	212 ₂₄
4:1–10	60	15	47, 129–130, 132, 138 ₅₃ , 139 ₅₄ , 140, 140 ₆₄ , 146, 208
4:3–5	89	15:2–32	138
4:19–22	90, 95–96, 101	15:3	139
4:21–22	98	15:4–7	160
1–4	6	15:4–6	139
4–6	4, 89–103, 121, 221	15:5	163
4:1–7:1	91	15:6	140 ₅₉
4:1	94	15:8	132
4:6–8	97	15:10–11	208
4:6–9	118–120	15:22–23	208
4:7	119	15:26	208
4:8	97–98, 119	15:28–29	208
4:9	97	15:31–33	152
4:12–13	163	15:32–33	132
5–6	91, 96, 98–99, 101, 103, 223–224	15:35	208
5	70, 121, 124, 222	16–17	114 ₁₉
5:8	73	16:1	114 ₁₉
5:10	63, 70	16:13	136
6	121	16:18	114 ₁₉
6:6	97	17	51, 53, 55, 60, 221
6:15	101, 101 ₇₀ , 102	17:1	47
6:17	60	17:4	73
6:19	103	17:28	164
7:1	92	17:44	216 ₄₄
7:2–3	94	17:45	55
7:14	63	17:46	216 ₄₄

17:52	63	27:8	135, 138 ₅₃ , 139, 160, 175–176 ₁₇ , 181 ₃₄
17:58	114 ₁₉	27:10	130 ₇ , 135
18–25	132	27:12	53
18	53	28	139, 208, 208 ₄
18:3	212	28:1–2	139
18:9	136	28:1	47
18:17–19	212 ₂₄	28:3	139
20:8, 12–17, 42	212	28:4	47, 124
20:12	122, 137 ₄₉	28:15	130 ₇
21	73	28:16–19	209
21:8	117	28:18	138, 138 ₅₃
21:11–16	112 ₃	29	53, 112, 122, 130, 221
22	212 ₂₃	29:1–2	139
22:2	130 ₇	29:1	47, 52
22:3–4	112, 116, 221	29:6	117, 119 ₃₆ , 124
22:6–23	117 ₂₈ , 209 ₈	29:10–11	130
22:10, 13, 15	208 ₄	29:11	52, 130–132
22:20	130 ₇	30	4–5, 47, 129–146, 184 ₅₂
23	53, 184 ₅₂	30:1	130, 132, 135, 140, 142 ₇₇
23:2, 4	208 ₄	30:2	137
23:6	130 ₇	30:3	136
23:9–12	208 ₄	30:4	136
23:9	130 ₇	30:5	130 ₇
23:10–11	122	30:6	130 ₇ , 135
23:11	130 ₇	30:7	130 ₇ , 208 ₄
23:13	124	30:8	130 ₇ , 138, 208 ₄
23:14	164	30:9	124, 130 ₇ , 135
23:16	130 ₇	30:10	129, 130 ₇ , 136
23:17–18	212	30:11	138
23:24	164	30:12	136
23:27	135	30:13–14	130, 132
23:29	165	30:13	136, 140
24:1–2	164–165	30:14–17	140
24:3	165	30:14	113, 113 ₁₂ , 136
24:22–23	212	30:15	138, 140
25:1	139, 164	30:16	137
25:13	130 ₇	30:17	133, 136, 139
25:18	136	30:18	138, 140
25:25	130 ₇	30:19	136
25:27	130 ₇	30:20	133, 137
25:32	122	30:21–25	129
25:34	122	30:21	130 ₇ , 136
25:42–43	130 ₇	30:22	130 ₇ , 135, 137
26:2	164	30:25	136
26:6	112, 121 ₄₄	30:26–31	132
26:19–20	122	30:26	129 ₃ , 130 ₇ , 136
27	53, 73, 146, 184 ₅₂	30:27–30	129, 133–134, 137
27:1–28:2	112, 221	30:27	134, 142 ₇₇
27:2	53, 124	30:28	142 ₇₇
27:8–9	132	30:29	130 ₇ , 140 ₅₉

30:30	142 ₇₇	8	3, 50, 116, 161–162, 172,
30:31	129 ₃ , 142 ₇₇		174, 174 ₁₃ , 175, 175 ₁₆ ,
31	51–52, 54, 60, 207, 211, 211 ₂₀ , 212 ₂₄ , 214 ₃₄		178, 182, 184 ₅₇
31:1	131	8:1–14	153, 196
31:4	52	8:1–6	172, 173 ₄ , 184, 184 ₅₃ , 197
31:7	52	8:1	47
31:9	58	8:2	116, 172, 182 ₄₃
31:10–13	124	8:3–13	187
		8:3–8	175 ₁₅
		8:3–6	172, 175, 179, 183
		8:4	197
		8:5–6	173, 173 ₄
		8:5	171
		8:6	171
		8:7–14	184
		8:7–12	172, 173 ₄ , 179, 197
		8:9–10	171, 187
		8:10	184 ₅₆
		8:12–14	6, 161
		8:12	138 ₅₃ , 139–140, 171
		8:13–14	172, 173 ₄ , 179, 218
		8:13	158, 171, 173, 173 ₅ , 179, 179 ₂₈ , 185, 197
		8:15–18	172
		8:15	179
		8:18	113
		9	51, 175, 209, 212, 212 ₂₃
		9:1	135
		10–12	116, 173, 174 ₁₂ , 174 ₁₃ , 175, 175 ₁₅ , 176, 179, 182
		10	172, 175 ₁₆ , 178–179
		10:1–5	174, 174 ₇ , 175, 179
		10:1	175
		10:3	174 ₇
		10:6–19	171, 173–174, 174 ₇ , 175, 186 ₆₆ , 187, 187 ₇₃ , 196
		10:6–14	174, 174 ₉ , 175, 185–187
		10:6	173 ₆ , 186 ₆₆
		10:14	174 ₇
		10:15–19	174–175, 175 ₁₄ , 185–187
		10:16–17	188
		10:18	183, 197
		11	113, 175
		11–12	114, 114 ₁₈ , 121, 174 ₁₀ , 174 ₁₁
		11:1	174
		11:3	114 ₁₈
		11:6	114 ₁₈
		11:11	121
		11:12	137 ₄₉
2 Samuel			
1	53, 146		
1:1–16	114, 117		
1:1–2	132		
1:1	138 ₅₃ , 139		
1:8	132 ₁₈ , 138 ₅₃ , 139, 139 ₅₄		
1:13	132 ₁₈ , 138 ₅₃ , 139, 139 ₅₄		
2	53, 121, 130, 184 ₅₂		
2:1	208 ₄		
2:3	124		
2:4	132		
2:9	180 ₃₃		
2:12–13	212 ₂₃		
2:24	164		
2:30	136 ₄₄		
2:32	216 ₄₉		
3	175, 181–182, 186, 196		
3:3	112, 172, 175, 180, 187, 190, 197, 222		
3:7	210, 210 ₁₃		
4	212 ₂₃		
4:3	113, 114 ₁₆		
5	3, 51, 53, 60, 184 ₅₂		
5:6–9	116		
5:11	112		
5:17–25	216 ₄₉		
5:18	135		
5:22	135		
6	90–91, 99, 102–103, 120		
6:1–11	103		
6:3	103		
6:6–7	103		
6:7	102		
6:10–12	112–113, 222		
6:12–13	103		
6:14	103 ₇₉		
6:23	102, 212 ₂₄		
7:12	216 ₄₈		
8–12	221		

11:17	114 ₁₈	17:8	130 ₇
11:21	114 ₁₈	17:14	113, 115 ₂₂
11:24	114 ₁₈	17:15	115 ₂₂
12:9–10	114 ₁₈	17:22	136
12:14	136	17:23	216 ₄₉
12:16	208 ₄	17:25	113, 113 ₁₄
12:26–31	175, 175 ₁₄	17:27	112, 115, 222
13–20	176	18:1	178
13–15	175–176, 178, 181–182, 186, 196–197	18:2	113–114, 113 ₉ , 114 ₁₇ , 125
13–14	176–177	18:5	113–114, 125
13:1–22	177 ₂₁	18:9–14	178
13:3	189	18:12	113–114, 125
13:23–39	177 ₂₁ , 178	18:14	178
13:34	177	18:19–19:8	178
13:37–38	172, 180, 187, 192	19–20	125
13:37	175–178, 190, 197	19:9	178
13:38	177	19:11–12	120 ₃₈
14:1–23	177	19:14	113
14:23	172, 175–176, 180, 197	19:16–17, 18–23	178
14:24–33	177	19:17–18, 24–30	178
14:32	172, 175–176, 180, 197	19:32–39	178
14:33	177	19:38	216 ₄₉
15–19	176–178	20	176, 178
15–17	113, 115 _{22–23}	20:1	130 ₇ , 160
15:14–17:29	178	20:7	119
15	73	20:14–22	192 ₁₀₀
15:2	163	20:19	122
15:6	181, 181 ₃₄	20:23	119
15:8	171–172, 175–176, 178 ₂₅ , 180–181, 181 ₃₄ , 181 ₃₅ , 187, 197	21–24	112 ₅ , 208, 208 ₃
15:9	181	21	102
15:12	117 ₂₃	21:1–14	6, 112, 207–217, 222
15:13	178	21:1	207–208, 208 ₄₅ , 211 ₁₉ , 212 ₂₃ , 214–215
15:18	113, 113 ₉	21:2–6	209
15:19	113 ₉ , 114 ₁₇ , 125	21:2–3	209, 212, 215
15:21	114 ₁₇ , 118, 125	21:2	112, 208–209, 211, 211 ₁₉ , 222
15:22	113 ₉ , 114 ₁₇	21:3	211, 212 ₂₅ , 215
15:19–22	113–114, 117, 124–125, 178	21:4	209, 212 ₂₅
15:32	113, 115 ₂₂	21:6	210, 212, 216
16:1–4	178	21:7	209, 212, 212 ₂₁ , 212 ₂₃ , 215
16:1	136	21:8–9	210, 212, 216
16:5–12	178	21:8	212 ₂₁ , 212 ₂₄
16:5	215 ₃₉	21:9	210 ₁₂
16:6	130 ₇	21:10	209–210, 213–214, 216, 216 ₄₆
16:7–8	212 ₂₃ , 215	21:11–14	210, 213
16:7	130 ₇ , 135 ₃₇	21:12	211, 211 ₁₇ , 212, 212 ₂₄ , 213 ₂₆ , 214–215
16:16	113, 115 ₂₂		
17:5	113, 115 ₂₂		

21:13	210 ₁₄ , 211, 211 ₁₇ , 212, 212 ₂₄ , 213 ₂₆ , 214–215	7:5	136
21:14	212 ₂₄ , 213 ₂₆ , 214, 214 ₃₃ , 216 ₄₉ , 217	7:7	136
21:19	73, 113 ₉ , 204 ₃	8:9	141 ₇₁
22:2	208	8:12	187
23	111	8:24	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
23:36–37	114	9:10	216 ₄₄
23:39	113	9:20	137
24	116	9:28	216 ₄₉
		9:30–37	216 ₄₄
		10:35	216 ₄₈
		12:17	73, 123
<i>1 Kings</i>		12:22	216 ₄₉
1–2	122, 124, 176	13:3	187
1:21	216 ₄₈	13:9, 13	216 ₄₈
1:30	122	13:14–19, 25	195
1:38	113	14:7	158, 173, 179 ₂₈
1:44	113	14:13–14	89
1:48	122	14:16, 22, 29	216 ₄₈
2:10	216 ₄₈	14:20	216 ₄₉
4	124	15:7	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
4:7–19	161	15:22	216 ₄₈
6–8	89	15:28	216 ₄₈
8	93, 99	15:29	52, 189 ₈₃ , 195
8:1	89	15:38	216 ₄₉
8:6	89	16:5, 7–9	186 ₆₆
8:41–43	123	16:6	179, 197
9:16	5	16:8	89
9:21	135	16:10–16	121
9:26	158	16:20	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
11:14	153	17	90 ₅
11:21, 43	216 ₄₈	17:9	162
12:16	160	17:24	184
13:22	216 ₄₉	18:15–16	89
14:11	216 ₄₄	20:21	216 ₄₈
14:20	216 ₄₈	21:18	216 ₄₈
14:25–28	89	22:20	210 ₁₄ , 216 ₄₇
14:31	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉	23:30	216 ₄₉
15:8	216 ₄₈	24:6	216 ₄₈
15:16–22	186 ₆₆	24:13	89
15:24	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉	25:8–17	89
16:4	216 ₄₄		
16:6, 28	216 ₄₈	<i>Isaiah</i>	
21:13	130 ₈	1:7	136
21:19, 23, 24	216 ₄₄	2:1–5	123
22:40	216 ₄₈	6	93
22:51	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉	8:2	121
		14:19	136 ₄₃ , 216 ₄₅
<i>2 Kings</i>		34:5–6	129, 139 ₅₉
1:2–3	63	38:15	130 ₈
4:24	137	42:11	164
6:8	187	56:1–8	123

62:10	130 ₈	<i>Obadiah</i>	
63:1	129	1–14	139 ₅₉
<i>Jeremiah</i>		<i>Jonah</i>	
3	105 ₉₃	1	123
3:16–17	89, 100–101	1:8–9	120 ₃₈
3:16	90	2:1	136
6:8	209 ₁₀	4:7	136 ₄₆
7:33	216 ₄₄		
8:1–3	210 ₁₄ , 216 ₄₅	<i>Micah</i>	
14:16	216 ₄₅	1:7	136 ₄₁
16:4–7	216 ₄₅	1:10	134 ₂₈
16:4	216 ₄₄	4:1–5	123
22:18–19	216 ₄₅		
25:20	60, 75, 123	<i>Zephaniah</i>	
25:33	210 ₁₄ , 216 ₄₅	2:4	60, 75
26:20–23	121	2:5	113 ₁₂
33:5	96		
47:5–7	75	<i>Haggai</i>	
49:7–22	139 ₅₉	2:15	136
49:23	134 ₂₈	2:18	136
<i>Ezekiel</i>		<i>Zechariah</i>	
23:17–18	209 ₁₀	9:2	134 ₂₈
25:12–14	129, 139 ₅₉	9:5	75
25:16	113 ₁₂	9:5–7	60, 123
27:31	130 ₈		
29:5	210 ₁₄ , 216 ₄₄	<i>Malachi</i>	
32:4–5	216 ₄₄	1:2–5	139 ₅₉
33:27	216 ₄₄	1:3–4	129
34:5, 8	216 ₄₄		
35:2–9	129, 139 ₅₉	<i>Psalms</i>	
36:5–7	139 ₅₉	10:1–10	96
39:4–5, 17–20	216 ₄₄	79:1–3	216 ₄₄ , 216 ₄₅
39:5	216 ₄₅	83:8	138 ₅₃
39:22	136	106:34–36	116 ₂₅
43:27	136	132:6–8	93
		137:7–9	129, 139 ₅₉
<i>Hosea</i>		<i>Job</i>	
1:4	215 ₄₁	1:3	141 ₇₁
<i>Joel</i>		1:17	135
4:19	139 ₅₉	2:13	136
		3:20	130 ₈
<i>Amos</i>		7:11	130 ₈
1:6–8	123	10:1	130 ₈
1:11–12	139 ₅₉		
6:2	73, 134 ₂₈	<i>Proverbs</i>	
6:13	112 ₄	31:6	130 ₈
8:3	136 ₄₃		

<i>Ruth</i>		7:29	124 ₆₁
1	125	8:13	134 ₂₈
1:15–18	123	8:29	212 ₂₃
		9:35	212 ₂₃ , 214 ₃₇
<i>Song of Songs</i>		10:11	124 ₆₁
4:3	136	10:13–14	214 ₃₄
6:7	136	13:13	113 ₉
		17:11	216 ₄₇
<i>Lamentations</i>		18:1	73
4:21	129	18:3	184
		18:10	184, 184 ₅₆
<i>Ezra</i>		18:11	138 ₅₃ , 140
2:64–67	141 ₇₁	18:12	173 ₅
8:33	121	19:6–7	173 ₆
10:13	136 ₄₂	19:16–17	185
		20:5	113 ₉
<i>Nehemiah</i>		<i>2 Chronicles</i>	
3:4	121	2:5	136 ₄₂
3:21	121	9:31	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
4:1	124 ₅₇	11:8	134 ₂₈
7:68	141 ₇₁	12:16	216 ₄₈
8:4	121	13:23	216 ₄₈
13:23–24	124 ₅₇	16:13	216 ₄₈
<i>1 Chronicles</i>		21:1	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
1:36	138 ₅₃ , 140	24:25	215 ₄₁
2:17	113, 113 ₁₄	25:28	216 ₄₉
2:23	180	26:2	216 ₄₈
2:55	140 ₅₉	26:6	73
3:2	180	26:23	216 ₄₈ , 216 ₄₉
4:17	142 ₇₇	27:9	216 ₄₈
4:28–31	142	28:18	79, 135
4:28–32	133	28:27	216 ₄₈
4:30	142 ₇₇	32:33	216 ₄₈
4:32	142 ₇₇	33:20	216 ₄₈
4:42–43	138 ₅₃ , 139, 145–146	34:28	210 ₁₄ , 216 ₄₇
5:21	141 ₁	35:3	93
6:65	124 ₆₁	35:24	216 ₄₉

Deuterocanonical Literature

<i>1 Maccabees</i>		<i>2 Maccabees</i>	
5:13	186	2:5–7	89, 100–101, 104
5:26–36	186		
		<i>2 Esdras</i>	
		10:22	89 ₂

Other Ancient Sources

El-Amarna Correspondence

205:3 185
 256 190₈₉

Papyrus Anastasi VI

5, 154–155

Merenptah Stele

10, 20–22, 25, 29

Ras Shamra

11.840 115

Azatiwada Inscription (KAI 26)

c iv 14–16 135₃₅

Arslan Tash Inscription (KAI 27)

1 137₄₈
 9 137₄₈

Mesha Inscription (KAI 181)

15 137₄₈
 26 137₄₈

Sefire Inscription (KAI 222)

B3:1–3 135₃₅

Leiden Magical Papyrus

345+347 verso 7 120₄₀
 343+345 138

Josephus

B.J. 5.215 89

Pseudo-Philo

LAB 64–65 132₁₅, 132₁₈

Eusebius, Praeparatio evangelica

9.39 100₆₆

Mishnah

m. Yoma 5:1–2 90

Talmud

b. Yoma 52b–54 89

Index of Modern Authors

- Adelman, R. 90
 Alt, A. 143
 Arav, R. 195
 Arie, E. 54
 Auld, A.G. 163
 Aurelius, E. 55, 177
- Bächtold, M. 1–2, 4
 Bar-Efrat, S. 119, 130, 134
 Barash, J.A. 105
 Barth, F. 13, 15
 Baudelaire, C. 4, 104–105
 Baudrillard, J. 106
 Ben-Yosef, E. 2, 5
 Bezzel, H. 2–3, 7, 93, 213–215
 Bienkowski, P. 5, 155, 158–160
 Binford, L. 12
 Bordreuil, P. 115
 Boucheron, P. 90
 Bourdieu, P. 14
 Brather, S. 18
 Brubaker, R. 15
 Buchberger, E. 18
 Bühner, W. 2, 6–7
- Childe, G. 11
 Clarke, D. 12
 Curta, F. 18
- Dever, W.G. 21
 Díaz-Andreu, M. 14
 Dietrich, W. 91, 119, 130, 133, 135, 138, 183
 Dothan, M. 70
 Dothan, T. 63
- Edenburg, C. 2, 4–5, 92, 94–97, 100, 164–165
 Emberling, G. 14
 Eriksen, T. 31
- Faust, A. 25, 27–28
 Fazioli, K.P. 18
 Finkelstein, I. 48–49, 51, 54, 92–93, 142, 159–160
- Fischer, A. 134, 180, 183
 Fraade, S.D. 106
 Frevel, C. 161
 Frick, F. 162
- Gaß, E. 124
 Germany, S. 1–2, 6–7, 51–52, 94, 123–124
 Gitin, S. 63
 Grillet, B. 119
- Haarmann, V. 123
 Hakenbeck, S. 18
 Hall, J. 14
 Halsall, G. 16
 Harland, J. 18
 Harpazi-Ofer, S. 81
 Hartenstein, F. 213
 Hayes, J.H. 161
 Hensel, B. 7, 91, 95
 Hitchcock, L. 49
 Hodder, I. 12
 Hoffmeier, J. 154
 Hutter, M. 112
 Hutzli, J. 1, 4, 94
- Ilan, D. 194
- Jakoubek, M. 31
 Jenkins, R. 10
 Jones, S. 14
- Kelm, G. 79
 Kempinski, A. 163
 Killebrew, A. 2–3, 49
 Kleiman, A. 1–2, 6, 186, 194
 Koch, I. 49, 53–55
 Kossinna, G. 11, 16
 Kratz, R. 94
 Kroeber, A. 11
- Lestienne, M. 119
- Maier, A. 1–2, 49, 73
 Master, D. 76

- Mazar, A. 79
 Mazar, B. 81
 McCarter, P.K. 92, 112, 119, 121, 134, 163
 Migdal, J. 16
 Miller, J.M. 161
 Miller, P.D. 91–92, 98
 Münger, S. 190

 Na'aman, N. 133–134, 183
 Naveh, J. 63

 Oftestad, E.A. 106
 Ohnuki-Tierney, E. 105

 Pioske, D. 164–165
 Pohl, W. 18
 Porzig, P. 91, 93

 Reger, G. 16
 Reher, G. 15
 Rice, J.W. 1–2, 4
 Ricœur, P. 105
 Roberts, J.J.M. 91–92, 98
 Römer, T. 92–93, 100
 Rost, L. 4, 91, 94, 176

 Rowton, M. 165

 Sackett, J. 12
 Savran, G. 119
 Schäfer-Lichtenberger, C. 92
 Schicklberger, F. 91–92
 Schipper, B. 121
 Sergi, O. 49, 54, 186
 Shennan, S. 14
 Singer-Avitz, L. 195
 Stager, L. 76

 Taylor, W. 12
 Thomas, Z. 2, 5
 Timmer, J. 106
 Tsing, A.L. 105
 Tsumura, D. 162

 Ucko, P. 12

 Van Seters, J. 207

 Wiessner, P. 12
 Wimmer, A. 15

Index of Subjects

- Absalom 112–113, 115, 117, 125, 175–178, 180–181, 186, 197
Achish 53–54, 112–113, 115, 117–120, 124, 131, 164–165
Adad-Nirari III 5, 50, 153–155, 159
Ahab 22
Amalek 2, 4–5, 129–133, 135, 138–142, 145–146, 159–160, 163
Amalekites 5, 47, 115, 129–130, 132–133, 139–141, 144–146, 160, 163, 208, 221, 224
Amasa 113
Ammonite(s) 47, 51, 111–112, 114–115, 174–176, 179, 186, 197, 221–222
Aphek 52–54, 60, 117–118, 122, 130
Arab(s) 5, 142, 155
Arabah 5, 139, 143, 151, 153–158, 160–162, 173, 179, 185
Aram 2, 153, 171–173, 176, 178–181, 183, 185, 187–189, 193, 195–198
Arameans 6, 54, 171–175, 179, 181–185, 187–188, 194, 196–198, 221, 224
Ark Narrative 4, 51, 90–92, 94–99, 101–104, 223
Ashdod 3, 49, 60, 62, 64, 70, 72, 76, 85, 123–124, 224
Ashkelon 3, 49, 60, 64, 75–76, 85, 123
Assyrians 3, 51–52, 54–55, 89, 100, 143, 185, 194–195, 222

Babylon 95, 97, 100, 180
Benjamin (region) 7, 82, 164, 208, 210, 214, 217
Bloodguilt 7, 211, 214–215, 217
Boundaries 6, 12–13, 16, 144

Canaan 20–21, 24, 49, 141, 188, 208
Canaanite(s) 25, 28–29, 49, 113, 120, 190–193
Catastrophe Narrative 90–91, 93, 95
Cherethites/Cretans 113
Cipher 4–5, 51, 142, 145
Copper/Copper production 5–6, 154–160, 162, 185

Court History 50–51, 176
Damascus 6, 73, 86, 152–153, 155, 172–173, 175, 179, 183, 185, 187–189, 193–196
David 12, 53–54, 59–60, 73, 102–103, 111–116, 121–125, 129–134, 139, 144–146, 172–180, 197–198, 207–215, 217, 221–222
Defining Israel 2, 9–46
Desert 5, 139, 141–142, 145–146, 151, 154, 156, 160, 163–165

Eben-ezer 53, 92
Edom 112–113, 115, 120–121, 129, 139–140, 143, 145, 151–162, 166, 172–173, 179, 185, 222–223
Edomite(s) 117, 120, 144–145, 155–160, 179, 221–222, 224
Entanglement 14
Ekron/Tel Mique 49, 60, 62–64, 70, 73, 75–76, 79, 85, 123, 224
Ethnicity 2, 11–18, 25, 31, 49, 188

Foreigner(s) 55, 113–117, 122–123, 125, 221–222

Galilee, sea of (region) 21, 182, 185, 190–198
Gath/ Tell es-Safi 49, 52–54, 60, 62, 64, 70, 73, 75, 82, 85, 112–113, 117, 123–124, 164, 221
Gaza 49, 60, 123
Geshur 112, 124, 171–172, 175–178, 180–182, 186–198, 221–222
Geshurite(s) 180–182
Gibeon 164–165, 208, 210
Gibeonite(s) 6–7, 112, 207–209, 211, 213–217, 222
Gilboa 51–54, 60, 131–132, 139

Hazeel 52, 54, 73, 75, 86, 152, 155, 183, 185, 194
Hebron 5, 53, 142–145, 181
Hellenistic period 5, 129, 144, 195–196
hieros logos 91

- History of David's Rise 51–53, 91, 94, 130, 164, 221, 223
Hittite(s) 112–115, 121, 135, 221
Hushai the Archite 113, 115
- Ideology 22, 106, 133
Idumea 4–5, 129, 144–146
Idumean(s) 5, 145–146
Iron age 9, 17–32, 47–50, 54, 70, 76, 85, 134, 142, 151–152, 154–162, 165–166, 190–193, 197–198, 224
Ishmaelite(s) 113
Ittai the Gittite 114–115, 117, 178
- Jabesh-gilead 7, 124
Jebusite 116
Jerusalem 24, 53, 63, 79, 89–93, 95, 98–101, 106, 112, 115–118, 152, 163, 172, 179, 221–222
Jezreel 52–54, 93, 131
Jonathan 14, 210–214, 216–217
- Kenites 5, 139
- Levant 9, 11–12, 17–18, 20–21, 24, 134, 152, 155, 166, 171, 188, 191, 193–194, 196, 224
- Merenptah (stele) 10, 20, 22, 25, 29
Midian 5, 139, 159
Midrash 5, 129, 146
Moab 112, 115, 135, 221
Moabite(s) 111, 115–116, 172, 221
Mycenaean IIIC pottery 60, 63, 70, 73, 79
- Nathan 114, 116
Negev 5, 133, 139, 142–145, 151, 155–161, 163–165
Neo-Assyrian period 96, 144, 155
New Archaeology 11, 13
Nomads 143, 153, 156–157, 159
Non-Israelite Groups 7, 223
- Obed-Edom 112–113, 115, 120–121, 222
- Pelethites 113
Pentapolis 60, 64, 70, 73, 75–76, 85, 113, 224
Persian period 4–6, 27, 100, 131, 138, 180, 186, 195, 197–198
Philistia 26, 30, 51, 53, 55, 60, 73, 86, 96, 101, 153, 156
Philistine(s) 47–50, 52–55, 60, 63–64, 70, 73, 82, 99–100, 112–114, 117–122, 123–124, 138, 152, 163, 221
Pots equals peoples 2, 12
- Samari(t)an(s) 23, 96
Saul 48, 50–54, 59, 111–112, 114–115, 122, 131–132, 139, 146, 152, 161–165, 175, 178–180, 207–217, 221–222
Saulides 7, 209–210, 212–213, 216–217
Sargon II 60, 72–73, 184
Seir 139, 145, 153–154, 158–159
Septuagint 55, 116–120
Shalmaneser III 22, 183, 185, 197
Shephelah 52, 144, 160, 224
Shobi the Ammonite 115
Social theory 11, 13–15
Succession Narrative 50, 91, 94, 176, 180, 208, 223
- Tamar 176–177
Tell Qasile 3, 60, 62, 73, 82, 85
Timna 5, 140, 154–158
Timnah/ Tel Batash 3, 60, 62, 79, 85
Tyre 112, 153, 155, 221
- Uriah 112–116, 121
- Yahweh/Yhwh 4, 89, 94, 96–98, 102–103, 111–112, 117–124, 132, 137, 140–141, 172–173, 181, 208–209, 215
Yigal 114
- Zadok 114, 116
Zelek the Ammonite 114
Ziklag 54, 112, 129–132, 139, 146, 222