

CHAPTER 8

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND THE SCHOOLS OF SCHOLARSHIP

Reconstructing the character of Israelite Settlement has naturally preoccupied scholars of the period more than any other topic, for it is the very heart of the problem. But after decades of research, no agreement has been reached. Quite the contrary, differences of opinion have become even sharper, and the “traditional” archaeological evidence has only engendered further confusion.

As noted in the introduction (Chapter 1), three ways of understanding the process of Israelite Settlement have crystallized over the years. Two of them — the “unified military conquest” and the “peaceful infiltration” hypotheses — were formulated already in the 1920s and 1930s, while the “sociological” school originated in the early 1960s. In time, as the body of research grew, these theories took on various nuances — but their basic outlines have remain unchanged. In this chapter, we will briefly describe each of the three approaches and evaluate them in light of the latest archaeological evidence. (For surveys of the the various schools, see Weippert 1971:5–62; Miller 1977a:268–279; Gottwald 1979:192–219; Soggin 1975:1–30; Lemaire 1982; Chaney 1983:41–61.) Our own view will be set forth in full in Chapter 11.

THE UNIFIED MILITARY CONQUEST THEORY

The archaeological aspect of this line of inquiry was first formulated by Albright and his students starting in the 1930s (Albright 1935; 1937; 1939; 1950:24–34; Wright 1940; 1962:69–84; P. Lapp 1967; Kaufmann 1953; Malamat 1976b and, slightly more flexibly, 1983; Yadin 1979; 1982). This approach adhered closely to the description of the conquest of Canaan in the first chapters of the Book of Joshua, whereby Canaanite city-states throughout the country were subjugated in a series of battles and many of them were destroyed by fire. In the wake of their victories, the Israelites, who had come up from the desert, settled down in these areas. Three kinds of evidence were adduced in support of the unified conquest theory:

- the literal description in the Bible;
- the destruction levels at the close of the Late Bronze period encountered at sites such as Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim, Bethel and Hazor, which were

attributed to the invading Israelites (e.g. Albright 1939:20–23; P. Lapp 1967; Kelso 1968:32,47–48);

— historical parallels to nomadic tribes with low levels of material culture which, nonetheless, caused the collapse of strong and highly developed urban societies (e.g., Isserlin 1983).

G.E. Wright, one of the most prominent and orthodox advocates of the unified military conquest theory, described the events in these words:

There was an Israelite campaign of great violence and success during the 13th century. Its purpose was to destroy the existing Canaanite city state system, weakening local power to such an extent that new settlement, especially in the hill country, might be possible (1962:70).

The manifold evidence for the terrific destruction suffered by the cities of Bethel, Lachish, Eglon, Debir (Kiriath sepher), and Hazor during the 13th century certainly suggests that a planned campaign such as that depicted in Josh. 10–11 was carried out... We may safely conclude that during the 13th century a portion at least of the later nation of Israel gained entrance to Palestine by a carefully planned invasion... (1962:84).

Traditionally, proponents of the unified military conquest theory claimed it was the best explanation for the archaeological evidence, while their opponents, primarily Alt's students, rejected the notion that excavating the large Canaanite tells could contribute to the reconstruction of the process of Israelite Settlement (Noth 1938; 1960). This objection is as valid today as it was given the evidence available in the 1930s and 1940s, for the scholars of the Albright school were preoccupied with the devastation of the Late Bronze cities rather than with the Settlement of the Israelite tribes.

However, not only does archaeological evidence contribute decisively to our understanding of the period, but the data unearthed actually contradict the theory of a unified military conquest. In reviewing the evidence, we will emphasize the distinction between sites in the hill country and those in the lowlands. This distinction was critical during the period under discussion, although it has not been accorded due recognition.

Absence of LB remains

No evidence of the Late Bronze period was ever unearthed at a number of sites central to the biblical account of the conquest of Canaan. For certain sites, this embarrassing state of affairs has been known for decades — and with the expansion of archaeological investigation, the phenomenon has turned out to be even more widespread than anyone imagined. This subject has been discussed by others (e.g., Miller 1977b), so we will treat it only briefly.

Although the nature of *Jericho* in LB II has been discussed over and over, no unequivocal conclusions about the size of the settlement or the date of its

destruction have been reached; the character of this important site remains shrouded in fog (Kenyon 1957:256–263, summary by Avigad 1965:851–855).

There was a gap in occupation at *Ai* between the Early Bronze and Iron I periods (Callaway 1975:49), and no Late Bronze site has been discovered in the surrounding area (problem summarized by Yeivin 1971c:180–181).

Late Bronze material was found in the cemetery at *Gibeon* (Pritchard 1963:72). But because no remains of the period have been found on the tell itself (Pritchard 1962:157–158), it is hard to envision an important city there at the time.

To date, only the lower city of the Early Bronze period has been excavated at *Tel Yarmuth*. However, the site has been surveyed and no sherds of the Late Bronze period were picked up (Richardson 1968:12). Two hard-to-date sherds collected during Ben-Tor's excavations were hesitantly attributed to the Late Bronze period (Ben-Tor 1975:73). In short, there appears to be no evidence of Late Bronze occupation at the site.

Arad experienced a gap in occupation from the end of the EB II period until the 11th century BCE (Aharoni 1975:82:88). The absence of LB II remains from any of the intensively excavated tells of the Beersheba Valley (Aharoni 1976a:59) has effectively quashed the contention that Late Bronze *Arad* must be sought elsewhere in the vicinity (Aharoni and Amiran 1964:14 4–147; B. Mazar 1964: 2–3).

The earliest remains excavated during all the campaigns at *Heshbon* in Transjordan date from the Iron I period (Geraty 1976:42). The proposal to identify Canaanite *Heshbon* with Tell Jalul, some 10 km from Hisban (in Miller 1983:123–124), is unacceptable from the standpoint of historical geography (Miller 1983:124–125; for various attempts to solve the “problem” of *Heshbon*, see Geraty 1983).

To the best of our knowledge, *Taanach* was also uninhabited during the Late Bronze II period (Rast-1978:3; P. Lapp 1969:5).

Proponents of the unified military conquest theory initially attempted to minimize the gravity of the problem. Kelso, for example, wrote

The Jericho and *Ai* narratives present knotty problems to the students of Joshua's military campaign, but the over-all conquest itself is now one of the most striking findings in all Palestinian archaeology (1968:47).

Some of the attempts to explain or excuse the absence of Late Bronze levels at these sites were utterly ridiculous:

The walls were apparently of mud bricks, and in both cases they have disappeared through wind and rain erosion.... Jericho is in a strong wind zone where the air currents of cold Mt. Hermon, 9000 feet above sea level, are sucked down to the hot dead sea, 1300 feet below sea level (Kelso 1968:48).

Obviously we are not dealing with an isolated absence of LB II remains, which could be explained away somehow, whether by recourse to the powerful erosive forces of rain washing away the Late Bronze level at Jericho; by attributing the conquest of Ai to the destruction of nearby Bethel (Albright 1939:16); by identifying the Canaanite king of Arad as a chief of nomadic tribes (Glueck 1959:114); or by searching elsewhere for the cities mentioned (see above; also Callaway and Nicol 1966). This phenomenon must be discussed on a broad and comprehensive a level, rather than in the conventional site-by-site manner.

For example, at three of the sites mentioned in the biblical account — Arad, Yarmuth and Ai — great cities lay deserted from the time of their destruction in the Early Bronze period until small villages were founded on them in the early stages of the Iron Age. This has led various scholars, many of them associated with the German school of biblical research, to seek an etiological solution to the problem (e.g., Noth 1935; 1953:23ff.; Dussaud 1935; Zevit 1983:32). In this view, the tales of the conquest of these cities appearing in the Book of Joshua had been created over the years in order to explain the awesome ruins encountered by the first Iron Age settlers. Yadin, the most outspoken contemporary advocate of the Albright school, tried to harmonize the negative archaeological evidence with the biblical conquest narratives:

Wherever we find agreement between the biblical narrative and the archaeological evidence, there is no reason to doubt the historicity of that particular biblical source. On the other hand, wherever the archaeological evidence bluntly contradicts the biblical narrative — as in the case of Ai — we should examine the possibility that that particular chapter in the bible is either etiological, a later interpolation or an editor's misunderstanding... (1979:66–67).

But if so, the archaeological data listed above leave the episode of Israelite Settlement almost bereft of “historical” evidence!

Geographical distribution

The deployment of the principal Canaanite cities and of the Israelite Settlement sites is highly significant. Many of the cities mentioned in the biblical account of the conquest were located in the coastal plain, the Shephelah, and the northern valleys — precisely those areas which have yielded virtually no evidence of Israelite Settlement in the Iron I period (Chapter 3). On the other hand, the central hill country, the heartland of Israelite Settlement, is hardly represented at all in the tradition of the unified campaign of conquest. Archaeological and historical evidence clearly indicate that the spread of the Israelites into the lowlands began only toward the end of the 11th century, and this expansion was largely a phenomenon of the 10th century, during the

United Monarchy (Tell Beit Mirsim B3, Beth Shemesh IIa, Gezer VIII, Aphek X-8, Megiddo VB).

At the end of Late Bronze period and during Iron I, the coastal plain, the Shephelah and the northern valleys were the scene of great disturbances. Many cities suffered damage, and a new ethnic entity, the Philistines, appeared on the scene. However, in these areas there were no drastic changes in either the density or the extent of occupation. The revolutionary demographic upheavals of that era took place in the central hill country, which experienced an unprecedented flood of settlers. Suffice it to recall that in the entire territory of Ephraim, there were only five Late Bronze settlements, while for the Iron I period, 115 sites are known thus far. The situation in other hilly regions was similar.

Succession of occupation

Had there been a unified conquest of all or most of Canaan, we would expect to find Israelite Settlement to be most intense in the fertile and hospitable regions of the country, atop the ruins of the devastated Canaanite cities. And so the situation appeared to the advocates of the military conquest theory (Yadin 1979:5 8–59). But definite evidence of sparse Israelite Settlement on the remains of a freshly-destroyed Canaanite city has been found almost exclusively in the hill country (at Bethel), though possibly also at Tel Zeror in the Sharon, and Tell Beit Mirsim and Beth Shemesh in the Shephelah (at these sites, either the ethnic affiliation of the new settlers or the archaeological evidence is insufficiently clear).

At *Hazor*, which was previously regarded as a classic paradigm of this reconstruction, a considerable gap in occupation separated the destruction of Stratum XIII from the beginning of Stratum XII (Chapter 3). The situation at nearby *Dan* is uncertain: The Late Bronze occupation there has yet to be located, and Stratum VI, with its plethora of stone-lined silos, which was dated by the excavator to the beginning of the 12th century (Biran 1980:173–174), can just as easily be later in date, based on the examination of a group of vessels found in one of the silos (although this furnishes only a *terminus ante quem*). So it is possible that at *Dan*, too, the sparse occupation of Iron I followed the destruction of Canaanite *Laish* only after a period of abandonment.

Tell Beit Mirsim, *Beth Shemesh* and *Tel Zeror* are the only sites in the lowlands where there may have been a brief Israelite occupation immediately after the destruction of the Late Bronze city. However, it is noteworthy that the first two sites were located right on the border between the hill country and the Shephelah, and the Israelites (if they had settled there) were soon expelled from all three sites by the Sea Peoples. The situation at other sites in the coastal plain, the Shephelah, and the northern valleys that were mentioned in the conquest narratives and which have been satisfactorily excavated, can be summarized briefly:

Opinions are divided concerning the history of *Megiddo* during this period, especially over the question of when the site became Israelite. In any case, what is certain is that the pattern of succession differed both from that of Hazor and from that of Tell Beit Mirsim. The last Canaanite city, Stratum VIIA, was still viable during the second half of the 12th century BCE, and it is doubtful that its unfortified successor, Stratum VI, was Israelite (Chapter 3).

A new element with a highly developed material culture settled at *Aphek* following the destruction of the Egypto-Canaanite governor's residency in the second half of the 13th century BCE. Soon afterward, the site fell into the hands of the Philistines. There is no evidence of Israelite occupation before the beginning of the 10th century BCE (Kochavi 1981:82).

At *Gezer*, there was apparently a "partial hiatus in occupation" at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 12th centuries BCE, in the wake of the destruction of the Canaanite city; next came the Philistine phases (so summarized by Dever 1976:439; with reference to Stratum XIV, dated to the 13–12th centuries BCE, the picture is unclear: Dever *et al.* 1970:22–24; 1974:50–52; Kempinski 1976:213).

A long gap in occupation succeeded the destruction of the last Canaanite city, Stratum VI, at *Lachish* in the first half of the 12th century BCE (Ussishkin 1983:168–170).

Tell Halif (we accept its identification with Hormah: Naaman 1980:136–143) was continuously inhabited during the transition from the end of the Bronze Age into Iron I (Borowski 1982:59).

To summarize the archaeological evidence presented thus far, out of over 10 cities in the coastal plain, the Shephelah and the northern valleys mentioned in the conquest narrative (which were all identified with relative certainty and excavated in an orderly manner), only two, Hazor and Dan, offer any indication that a new entity, poor in material culture, settled above the ruins of the Late Bronze city. Even at these sites, the newcomers probably arrived only after some time had elapsed. Elsewhere, there was a lack of either Late Bronze occupation, Iron I remains, or evidence of new settlers — or else the picture was too hazy and indecipherable.

Chronological evidence

In recent years, important chronological data has accumulated from sites in many parts of the country. This new evidence exercises a decisive influence on the historical reconstruction of the events occurring in the region at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 12th centuries BCE. It is becoming increasingly clear that the main Canaanite centers were not wiped out in a single campaign, but rather that they succumbed gradually over the course of at least a century (Ussishkin 1985; Kempinski 1985:404, table of estimated dates). Noth, it will be recalled, had already hypothesized such a scenario nearly 50 years ago (1938:20).

The devastation of *Hazor* apparently took place no later than in the middle of the 13th century, for characteristic pottery of the end of the 13th century was lacking in Stratum XIII (Chapter 3). According to a tablet from Ugarit found in the destruction level of the Egyptian-Canaanite governor's residency, *Aphek* was destroyed in the second half of the 13th century (Chapter 9).

On the other hand, a metal object bearing the cartouche of Ramesses III, which was found in the area of the city gate of Lachish, testifies that Stratum VI there was destroyed no earlier than that Pharaoh's reign, i.e., around the middle of the 12th century BCE (Ussishkin 1983:168-170; 1985), several decades *after* Israel was mentioned in the Merneptah stele. Such a late date was already adumbrated during the excavations at Lachish in the 1930s (e.g., Tufnell 1958:36-37), but it was then rejected by scholars who were wedded to the preconceived notion that all of the Canaanite cities had been destroyed simultaneously at the end of the 13th century (e.g., Albright 1939:20-21).

Megiddo Stratum VIIA was devastated even later, apparently in the second half of the 12th century BCE, according to the statue base of Ramesses VI discovered beneath a wall of Stratum VIIB (!) (Loud 1948:135 n.1).²⁹

For other cities destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze period, the chronological evidence is not clear enough to decide whether, for example, Tell Beit Mirsim C was savaged at the end of the 13th century or, as at nearby Lachish, only in the first half of the 12th century.

Archaeological evidence for dating the establishment of the Israelite Settlement sites in the hill country to the second half of the 13th century is hardly abundant (Chapter 9). However, the Mt. Ebal site, *Izbet Şarṭah* Stratum III and probably Giloh and other sites as well were already in existence prior to the destruction of Lachish, an important Canaanite city around which an unambiguous tradition of conquest had arisen. It is also not unreasonable to hypothesize that the Israelite Settlement sites in the vicinity of *Aphek* were founded even before the Egypto-Canaanite city was destroyed (Finkelstein 1986:206-208).

Other historical events

The reflexive attribution of all or most of the destruction levels *ca.* 1200 BCE in the Canaanite cities of the Land of Israel to a campaign of conquest by the Israelite tribes has caused a blind eye to be turned toward other historical possibilities: Egyptian military campaigns, such as the one led by Merneptah; local conflicts between rival Canaanite city-states; and the Philistine infiltration of the southern coast and the Shephelah during the first half of the 12th century BCE (already Noth 1938:19-20, see also Fritz 1973; Schoors 1985).

29 It was hard to separate the walls of Stratum VIIA from those of Stratum VIIB in Area CC, but even if the statue base was found under a Stratum VIIA wall, it is still a decisive piece of chronological evidence.

Naturally, these events occurred primarily in the coastal plain, the Shephelah, and the northern valleys, where many of the cities mentioned in the conquest narratives were also concentrated.

To remain faithful to the archaeological evidence, while at the same time adhering steadfastly to the theory of a unified military conquest, requires the following reconstruction of events: The Israelite tribes gained dominion over most of Canaan by means of a military campaign, during the course of which the major Canaanite cities were destroyed. Special efforts were expended in vanquishing the Shephelah, the Judean Hills, and certain areas of the coastal plain and the northern valleys. At the end of this military campaign, the victors failed to exploit the opportunity to settle in these fertile areas, at least some of which were almost vacant. Instead, they preferred the topographically difficult hill country, with its rocky terrain and thick forests. Obviously it is hard to swallow such a reconstruction, although more than one scholar has been imprisoned by it.

Nature of the relations between settled groups and nomads

Needless to say, this is probably the most convincing argument against a united military conquest. Our present knowledge of the society of the ancient Near East, especially of the relations between sedentary people and pastoral nomads, does not permit the romantic reconstruction of hordes of desert nomads invading the settled lands and devastating their inhabitants (see below and Chapter 11). Therefore, even if there were archaeological evidence for the contemporaneous destruction of many Canaanite cities at the end of the 13th century BCE, the identification of the aggressors would have to be sought elsewhere than among obscure desert tribes.

THE PEACEFUL INFILTRATION THEORY

The results of recent excavations and, even more so, the data from comprehensive surveys throughout the central hill country accord well with many of the tenets of the peaceful infiltration school of thought. The most notable exception is the issue of the origin of the new settlers. On this score and in various details, this reconstruction of the process of settlement needs to be "brought into line" with the accumulating socio-historical and archaeological evidence.

The originator of the peaceful infiltration theory was Alt (1925), who examined the episode of Israelite Settlement against the political, territorial, and demographic situation in the Land of Israel during the Late Bronze period, as reflected in the Bible and in New Kingdom Egyptian sources. He described Israelite Settlement as the peaceful infiltration of pastoral groups into the

sparsely populated regions of Canaan, part of a routine pattern of transhumance between the desert fringe and the central hill country (Alt 1939; see also Meek 1936 and, more recently, Klengel 1972:181–182).

Alt was thus the first scholar to recognize the value of geography, ecology and sociology as tools for studying Israelite Settlement, and in this respect, adumbrated contemporary scholarship. Both Alt and Noth, his student and successor, regarded the hill country of the Land of Israel as the place to search for solutions to the problems of the period.

Noth was the principal critic of the unified military campaign theory. He understood the snare in which that approach had become trapped: Biblical scholarship was bound up in the interpretation of the archaeological finds by the archaeologists themselves, who, in turn, relied on the biblical source! He viewed as “naive” the way in which archaeological evidence was used in the 1930s to verify the “conquest of Palestine”. Instead, he felt that the situation at each site and in every region must be judged on its own merits, and thereby became the first to advocate a regional approach to the study of the period.

Noth’s understanding of the biblical account was based on the distinction between the condensed description of the conquest in the first half of the Book of Joshua, which he regarded as a late composition, and the other, sometimes contradictory traditions scattered through Joshua 15 and Judges 1, which he tried to evaluate in light of archaeological evidence. Noth, then, regarded the episode of Israelite Settlement as an intricate, complicated, multifaceted process that continued for a long time (1938; 1957; 1960).

A turning point for the peaceful infiltration theory occurred in the 1950s, when Aharoni, who pioneered field work on Israelite Settlement, produced archaeological data that gave a fresh impetus to this approach. In recent years, Weippert has represented the German school and investigated the potential contribution of archaeology to the study of Israelite Settlement (1971; 1976; and, for a slightly different tack, 1979; see also Herrmann 1985, for the opinion of another of Alt’s students).

As noted, Alt’s views were firmly anchored in a thoroughgoing knowledge of both the physical and human landscape of the country, which enabled him to appreciate the ecological setting and social frameworks involved in the process of Israelite Settlement, even if he did not employ the terminology in use today.

For Alt, the process was a slow one. It began in the annual pastoralist routine of wintering in the desert fringe of Transjordan and summering in the central hill country, during the course of which links were forged with the sedentary population. The penetration of the sown areas was, according to Alt, generally peaceful and did not interfere with the lives of the existing residents, since the new settlers came to those areas of the hill country where Canaanite occupation was sparse. The search for pasturage repeated itself year after year, until the herders began to transfer the focus of their activities to the settled areas, at

the same time creating a network of agreements with the inhabitants. The newcomers gradually switched over to agriculture, although at first, while this activity was confined to the small areas available in the hills, they did not forego shepherding. As they began to clear the forests the new settlers became more firmly established in the hill country, and the economic importance of flocks waned.

Rowton (1965; 1967a; 1967b; 1973a; 1973b; 1974; 1976) has dealt extensively with pastoralism in the ancient Near East, expanding on the topics that Alt only touched upon. He placed particular emphasis on the importance of the forested areas of the hill country. According to him, the best grazing lands in our region were not in the desert fringe, but in the hilly enclaves of the settled sectors of the region. In these hilly areas, the combination of trees, bushes and pasturage served as a drawing card for both infiltrating nomads and uprooted elements from the nearby urban system. The pastoralists active in these areas maintained a symbiotic relationship with the permanent inhabitants of the proximal regions. The rugged zones of the hill country were difficult to control, which facilitated the process of infiltrating them. But once the tribes gained control of large plots of land, they affected both commerce and agriculture adversely and led to the contraction of the cities. As the city-states became weaker, nomads spread out farther, larger groups shifted to this form of nomadism ("enclosed nomadism," in Rowton's terminology), and penetration into the settled areas became more aggressive.

In Alt's view, the factual basis of the biblical description of the conquest was the second and later stage of the process, the period of territorial expansion that followed the phase during which the new settlers dwelled alongside the Canaanite population. When the biblical descriptions were redacted during the Monarchy, memories of the wars of expansion were still fresh. And since most of the territory was acquired in those campaigns, they were associated with the initial stage of Israelite Settlement. Thus, according to Alt, the story of Israelite Settlement was dramatized during the period of the Monarchy.

Weippert proposed (1979:32–34) that Alt's pastoral groups should be identified with the Shosu, nomadic groups living in the frontier regions, who are mentioned in Egyptian sources from c. 1500 to 1050 BCE. In his opinion, population growth within these groups undermined their nomadic subsistence economy and drove them to sedentarization.

Criticism of the peaceful infiltration theory came mainly from the advocates of the sociological school. Mendenhall, Gottwald and others pointed out the basic deficiency of Alt's theory — the inability to trace the origins of the pastoral groups in the steppe, outside the country (see below).

Admittedly, Alt's *weltanschauung* must be reconciled with this last issue; to the best of our knowledge, Israelite Settlement was not connected with the infiltration of any major new elements from the east. Rather, it represented a long process of sedentarization undergone by groups of pastoralists who,

during the Late Bronze period, had lived in various marginal zones within the Land of Israel, including the central hill country. This description, of course, requires certain changes in some details of Alt's reconstruction of Israelite Settlement, as we shall see in Chapter 11.

Aharoni was the first to try to examine Alt's views in the light of new and varied archaeological data. Based on his work in Galilee and in the Beersheba Valley, he offered a model of slow and peaceful Israelite Settlement in the remote, marginal, and inhospitable regions that were devoid, or nearly devoid, of Canaanite inhabitants; the settlers had initially to struggle against harsh environmental conditions, but not against an indigenous population (e.g., 1957:115–119; 1982:153–180; also Aharoni, Fritz and Kempinski 1975:121; B. Mazar 1981; Kempinski 1981; 1985).

This matter, too, must be "updated" to some extent, for it now appears that compared to the central hill country, Israelite Settlement in the regions investigated by Aharoni took place relatively late and was more limited in extent. Moreover, while Israelite Settlement did indeed commence in regions with a sparse — but nonetheless extant — Canaanite population, within them, the comparatively hospitable areas were preferred, even though these were naturally close to the Canaanite centers. The penetration into remote, virtually uninhabited, and inhospitable regions occurred only in the second phase of the process (Chapter 10).

Zertal seems to be the prominent archaeologist supporting the peaceful infiltration theory today (1986b). Based on the results of his Manasseh survey, he believes that the groups which settled in northern Samaria in Iron I came from the steppe. He thinks that they entered the region along the fertile valleys of Far'a and Malih and settled in the eastern part of the Manassite hill country. He interprets the finds at Mt. Ebal as evidence for the supra-tribal organization of these groups already in a very early stage of their sedentary activity. However, the results of the Manasseh survey are quite similar to the patterns uncovered in the survey of the land of Ephraim, and can be interpreted in a completely different way (Chapter 11)

Of late, Fritz has attempted to consolidate an independent approach to tracing the course of Israelite Settlement, based largely on the results of the excavations at Tel Masos (1980; 1981; 1982; Fritz and Kempinski 1983:231–233).

According to him, none of the current models fit the new data. Instead, the first Israelites were semi-nomads who entered the Land of Israel in the 15th and 14th centuries BCE; who spent the 13th century in a symbiotic relationship with the urban Canaanites, in whose territories they were already living; and who then settled down in the 12th century.

Fritz attributed the connections between the material culture of the inhabitants of Tel Masos — who were Israelites, in the eyes of Fritz and Kempinski — and that of the Canaanites to the phase preceding sedentarization, when

these people lived in groups adjacent to the Canaanite centers. Fritz, in fact, took elements from the sociological school and grafted them on to Alt's model; in other words, he concurred that the process was basically peaceful.

The refutation of Tel Masos' status as an Israelite Settlement site (Chapter 3) leaves Fritz's theory out on a limb, since it was based entirely on the highly developed material culture of that site. Nonetheless, certain elements of his reconstruction are close to our own, as we shall see. In any case, the main deficiency in his approach is that he sought the origins of the new settlers in the desert, which, as we have already explained, is no longer plausible.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL

G. Mendenhall's groundbreaking article in the *Biblical Archaeologist* in 1962 laid the foundations for the sociological approach (1962; also 1973; 1976). This school of interpretation was developed through the work of Gottwald in the 1970s (esp. 1979:191–233; also 1974; 1975; 1978a; see also, with slight differences: Dus 1975; de Geus 1976; Ahlström 1982; 1986; Halligan 1983; Chaney 1983; Lemche 1985). In this view, Israelite Settlement did not occur in the wake of a campaign of military conquest of Canaan; nor could it be characterized as the peaceful infiltration of pastoralists into sparsely populated regions of the country. For Mendenhall and Gottwald,³⁰ the oppressed and exploited groups at the bottom of the social strata of the royal Canaanite city-states rebelled against the ruling class — and therein lay the origins of Israel. Persecution by the upper classes caused the lowest social stratum to drop out of urban society by deserting the large cities of the coastal plain and the valleys in favor of the hill country, where these newcomers organized themselves in new frameworks. A slightly different version of this school of thought sought the origin of the Israelites in the pre-existing rural communities of the hill country, rather than among those of the plains (de Geus 1976:172–173; Halpern 1983:239).³¹

Mendenhall and Gottwald particularly stressed two points which, in their opinion, precluded a reconstruction of the Settlement process according to either Albright's or Alt's model: First, the basic social conflict in the Land of Israel was not between the Desert and the Sown or the Shepherd and the Farmer, but between the Village and the City (Mendenhall 1962:70; Gottwald 1979:461). Second, the nature of nomadic pastoralism in our region has been

30 The views of Mendenhall and Gottwald are lumped together here, despite the sharp attack on Gottwald issued recently by Mendenhall (1983).

31 In his review of Gottwald's book, Lenski (1980) proposed a somewhat different sociological model for the process by which Israel came into being, viz., a revolt by peasants and marginal elements of the population, but Gottwald (1983) rejected this hypothesis.

misunderstood: At that time, this mode of existence was of secondary importance, a kind of offshoot of village life, and not the lifestyle of a population originating in the desert (esp. Gottwald 1979:436–442,448–451).

The sociological school may be briefly summarized as an approach based on a new evaluation of the relations among pastoral, rural, and urban societies, and this, in turn, was largely based on information from the archives at Mari, in North Syria, dating from the early 2nd millennium BCE (Luke 1965; for an up-to-date review of the literature concerning the implications of the Mari documents on the research of the Settlement process, see Anbar 1985a:11–29).

The fresh insights presented by Mendenhall and Gottwald necessitate a reexamination of the entire issue of Israelite Settlement. Two of their points should be accepted:

— Before the domestication of the camel, there was not any significant populace living deep in the deserts of the Near East. Therefore, the origins of the Settlers should not be sought in those areas. (The dating of the domestication of the camel is still a controversial issue. For an earlier dating see Ripinski 1985 and for a late 2nd millennium dating see Albright 1971:206–207; Zeuner 1963:364–365; Zarins 1978. For a summary of the problem see Luke 1965:42–43; Bulliet 1975:ch. 2. It seems that the available evidence does not support the earlier date, especially not for the use of the camel as a subsistence animal in the “deep” desert).

— As a corollary of the above, shepherds/nomads and sedentary elements must have lived in proximity and engaged in reciprocal economic and social relations. In the past, as today, coexistence, rather than ongoing confrontation, characterized the relationship between the two groups. As we shall see, this has crucial implications for reconstructing the process of Israelite Settlement.

In other respects, however, it is hard to accept the views of Mendenhall, Gottwald and their followers. In particular, their claim that the people who settled in the hill country in Iron I came *directly* out of the social framework of the sedentary Canaanites in the lowlying regions must be rejected (Chapter 11).

The discussions by the adherents of the sociological school are noticeably deficient in two respects: The environmental aspect is treated only theoretically, and the archaeological contribution — both material culture and settlement patterns — is virtually ignored. (Further criticism is expressed by Hauser 1978 from the biblical standpoint and by Thompson 1978 and Lemche 1985 from the sociological angle; see also Herion 1986:14, who warns that modern, social science assumptions, can sometimes play a decisive role in shaping reconstructions of the past). Moreover, their acquaintance with the natural setting of the Land of Israel is strictly superficial and limited. By this we refer to the physical geography of the region and its influence on the inhabitants; the economic potential of the various zones; and the traditional lifestyle still followed today by some elements of the population, which can

help us understand social phenomena of the past. This is especially true of the hill country and the desert fringe, which are obviously critically important.

Mendenhall completely disregarded the archaeological evidence, while Gottwald made use of only the hackneyed evidence from the large Canaanite tells, without bothering to acquaint himself either with the results of excavations at the Israelite Settlement sites themselves or with the information coming from the comprehensive surveys undertaken all over the country. By failing to reconstruct the material culture and settlement pattern of the Late Bronze and Iron I periods, advocates of the sociological school foreclosed important avenues of inquiry into the question of Israelite Settlement.

Human ecology and environment

The model of Israelite Settlement constructed by Mendenhall and Gottwald is utterly divorced from the socio-ecological reality of its environment. Mendenhall's article could just as easily concern some other geographical — and perhaps even historical — setting, while Gottwald's work never comes "down to earth," as it were, and the few examples he adduced are essentially irrelevant to our region.

These flaws are especially evident in their critique of Alt's school. While Alt's approach, as his writings attest, was grounded in a thoroughgoing knowledge of the physical and human background of the central hill country, the arena of the principal events connected with Israelite Settlement, his critics related only to purely theoretical aspects and thus ended up cavilling over terminological nuances of minor importance.

The degree to which the proponents of the sociological school are removed from the scene of the events they purport to explain is particularly conspicuous with regard to the desert areas and the hilly regions of the country, which are of critical importance for the Settlement episode. They never bothered to consider whether the sedentarization of Beduin or the relations between the Beduin and nearby permanent settlements could help illuminate similar processes in antiquity (although extensive literature on both aspects had been in existence for decades).

Their contention that the desert regions bordering the country could not support a population of any significant size (e.g., Gottwald 1979:443) — their main reason for rejecting other possible origins of the Settlers — is refuted by the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s, 200,000–250,000 Beduin lived in these very regions (data from Shalem 1968:1–17; Muhsam 1966; Shmueli 1980:73), and their subsistence was based on flocks, not camels. Gottwald's claim (1979:444) that in our region only the Syrian desert was suitable for nomadic pastoralism is purely arbitrary; the Negev Highlands and certain areas of Transjordan and Sinai offer no less favorable ecological conditions (Marx 1974; Perevolotsky 1979).

The argument that regions where the annual precipitation is below 100 mm cannot support flocks is not accurate either. The quality of available grazing land is determined not only by the amount of rainfall, but also by both elevation and underlying rock formations, which affect the catchment of the runoff water and its accessibility. Thus, for example, excellent pasturage is found high up in the Sinai, although the annual precipitation there is relatively negligible.

In summary, Gottwald's fundamental error is that he took a body of data from North Syria at the beginning of the second millennium and applied it, without the slightest reservation or hesitation, to the Land of Israel at the end of the second millennium — heedless to the totally different geographical and historical settings involved (Lemche 1985:162 and see Anbar 1985a:188, who claims that Mari offers an analogy only to theories of peaceful infiltration by outsiders).

Gottwald's acquaintance with the heartland of Israelite Settlement is also insufficient. His assertion (1979:447,658–659) that springs and irrigation agriculture were important for settlement in the central hill country is astonishing, since the practice of irrigation agriculture was, in fact, utterly negligible in the region, and even today has been attempted in only a few villages.

No less bizarre is the theory — which has made a big splash among proponents of the sociological approach — that the knowledge of how to build terraces was the most important factor in the spread of settlement in the hill country in the Iron I period (Gottwald 1979:658–659; de Geus 1975; Thompson 1979; Stager 1982). Ahlström (1982) went even further and contended that the newcomers to the central hill country in Iron I brought this knowledge with them; he thus concluded that the settlers came from an agricultural — rather than semi-nomadic — background.

Intensive archaeological surveys completely contradict this notion. In the first place, the earliest Israelite Settlements turned out to be located in the very areas where terraces were less essential, while the classic terraced regions were practically devoid of Settlement sites. Second, terraces were obviously in use long before Iron I, at least since the beginning of relatively dense occupation in the hill country in MB II, especially on the western slopes; the need to build terraces was simply a function of topography and population growth (Chapter 4).

Surprisingly, those studies professing to examine the process of Israelite Settlement from a *sociological* perspective utterly fail to pursue the far-reaching implications of contemporary habitation in the hill country — the traditional Arab village, its setting, and its economy — for research into the processes of settlement in antiquity.

Settlement patterns

Gottwald anticipated the future direction of research — regional studies in the hill country — when he wrote:

The aim is to survey and/or sound all the sites in a given region so that they may be viewed contextually or ecologically. The results of such systematic area studies in depth should be of immense value for historical reconstruction... (1979:202).

...However, Israel emerged into the light of history from the countryside not the city.... It is precisely this germinative early Israelite rural hearland that archaeology has neglected. Happily there is at last some movement toward bringing the full powers of archaeology to bear on reconstructing the socio — economic organization of rural Israel (1978b:6).

Indeed, recent years have witnessed comprehensive field studies in many areas of the Land of Israel, including the central hill country. The distribution of Iron I sites in the territory of Ephraim, one of the two main regions of Israelite Settlement in the hill country, demonstrates that at the beginning of the period, there was a marked preference for the desert fringe, the interior valleys of the northern hills, and the Bethel plateau. Some 70% of all early Iron I sites were found in these regions (Chapter 4), where subsistence was primarily based on field crops and also, in many areas, on flocks. A similar picture arose from the 1968 preliminary survey in the territory of Benjamin, where almost all Israelite Settlement sites were located on the edge of the desert, and from Zertal's survey in Manasseh, where most of the early Iron I sites were located in the eastern part of the central range (Chapter 3). Conversely, the horticultural areas of the hill country were only relatively sparsely inhabited at that time. The settlement choices made by the Israelites were therefore at odds with the theories of the sociological school. The economic background of the newcomers was closer to that of pastoralists in the desert fringe than to sedentary dwellers in the plains and valleys.

Had the new settlers in the hill country been fugitives from the Canaanite polity, they would have been more likely to seek refuge in the rugged, relatively inaccessible regions of the western slopes — which were also devoid of Canaanite settlements. Our survey, however, paints a very different picture. Israelite Settlement sites were concentrated in the comparatively hospitable areas of the hill country, close to the few Late Bronze Canaanite cities in the region: Shechem, Bethel, Tappuah, etc. (on the similar situation in Lower Galilee, see Gal 1982:88–89). In Manasseh, too, the new settlements were established close to the main Canaanite cities. The explanation for this distribution seems to lie in the desire of the new settlers to exploit the already deforested areas in the vicinity of the Canaanite cities, where it was possible to

begin agricultural activities without first having to overcome environmental obstacles. (The question of whether Israelite Settlement developed in these areas before or after the destruction of the Canaanite cities remains unresolved.)

As for other matters raised by the sociological school, there is no archaeological basis for the supposition of a conflict between Village and City in the Land of Israel during the Late Bronze period. The rather sparse population of the country was concentrated primarily in the major cities and, to a lesser extent, in their immediate periphery. Small, unfortified, outlying settlements were virtually nonexistent (see Gonen 1984; Naaman 1982; Lemche 1985:421). If this phenomenon of the "country side" (to use Gottwald's term) existed at the time, it has not been detected in archaeological surveys, not even in the lowlands (with the possible exception of the southern coastal plain, e.g. Oren and Morrison 1986:74–75). Needless to say, the evidence from recent surveys, showing that the hill country was almost devoid of Late Bronze permanent settlements, rules out any theory that the Iron I settlers originated from pre-existing rural groups in that area (i.e. de Geus 1976: 172–173; Halpern 1983:239).

The most densely settled regions during the Late Bronze period were the southern coast and the Shephelah. In contrast to other areas of the country, almost no demographical crisis was felt in these regions in the Late Bronze period. One would expect that people fleeing them would settle in the hilly bloc of Judah to the east, for this region was elevated, isolated and uninhabited; indeed, in other periods, it functioned as a consolidated and isolated unit of habitation. The catch is that archaeological evidence indicates otherwise. There were, in fact, very few Settlement sites in the Judean Hills — only about 10 have been found (Chapter 3), as opposed to 115 in Ephraim and 95 in Manasseh (though ecological factors probably affected this too). Based on the number of sites in the various regions of the country and their dates, we conclude that the region densest in Israelite Settlement sites was the central hill country, between Jerusalem and the Jezreel Valley. From this nucleus, the Israelites spread south into Judah and north into Galilee during the second stage of the Settlement process (Chapter 10).

Field work undertaken in the border area between the hill country and the coastal plain also has a contribution to make. In the foothills opposite Canaanite (and later Philistine) Aphek, a group of seven Israelite Settlement sites was surveyed, and one of them, 'Izbet Šarṭah, was excavated extensively (Chapter 3). For the purpose of this discussion, it is immaterial whether these sites were established before or after the destruction of Canaanite Aphek in the second half of the 13th century BCE, because in either case it is obvious that if their inhabitants were uprooted from the Canaanite polity, they would have sought refuge in the hill country, and not on the periphery of the Canaanite settlements that continued to exist in the plain.

Material culture

The theory that the inhabitants of the central hill country in Iron I were fugitives from the oppressed lower rungs of Canaanite society requires a demonstration of continuity of Canaanite material culture at Israelite Settlement sites (e.g. Ahlström 1986:26–36,57). Advocates of the sociological school apparently found succor in statements such as:

Nevertheless, with one outstanding exception Philistine pottery, the techniques and styles of Iron I suggest more of a cultural continuum from LB than a cultural break (Miller 1977a:255).

It is clear, however, that once again such determinations were made almost exclusively on the basis of excavations at the large tells in the Jezreel Valley and the coastal plain. Since there was no Israelite occupation in these regions during the early phases of the Iron Age, such statements are devoid of significance regarding the process of Israelite Settlement.

Callaway (1976), Cooley (1975) and Ahlström (1984a; 1984b, 1986:26–36, 57) were the first who discussed the finds from the hill country and the Beersheba valley, in an attempt to support the sociological approach.

Callaway (1985) interpreted the finds from his Ai and Khirbet Raddana excavations as evidence that the inhabitants of the hill country in the Iron I period came from rustic, rather than nomadic background. In his opinion, at the end of the Late Bronze period villagers from the lowlands (the coastal plain and Shephelah) were forced to emigrate eastwards, to the sparsely populated hill country. This movement, he claimed, was the result of demographic pressure, possibly following the arrival of the Sea Peoples.

Callaway accepted Alt's reconstruction of the Settlement process as basically correct, but he had reservations concerning the sociological approach (1985:33). However, his own reconstruction has absolutely no bearing on Alt's theory of a slow infiltration of groups of pastoralists into the hill country in a process of seasonal grazing. To the contrary, Callaway sounds the sociological approach nearly to the letter and the same arguments expressed against it below hold true for him as well (see also chapters 6 and 7). In any case, the archaeological evidence he presents to consolidate his views can not be used to support either theory, since it may be interpreted as evidence for trade with the neighboring areas, rather than as proof of the ethnicity or origins of the inhabitants.

The transition from Late Bronze to Iron I in the hill country was, in fact, characterized by an unmistakable change in material culture — in both pottery and architecture — as well as by a wholly new pattern of settlement. Archaeological data debunk all claims of a *direct* connection between the Late Bronze centers of the lowlying regions and the Iron I sites in the hill country.

Two prominent and typical features of Iron I architecture in the hill country

were pillared buildings, mostly of the four- room house type, and a special site plan in which the peripheral houses formed a defensive belt around the settlement (e.g., Ai, Tell en-Naşbeh). This site layout has no antecedents whatsoever at any of the Late Bronze sites excavated throughout the country, and pillared buildings were practically unknown there as well. The reasons are simple: Israelite architecture was rooted in the pastoral mode of existence preceding sedentarization, and it developed by adapting to the environmental conditions of the hill country. It is particularly significant that the influences of both the tent and the encampment are perceptible in the plans of several early Israelite sites.

At most Israelite Settlement sites, a third feature, the presence of dozens of stone-lined silos, was also frequently encountered. A proliferation of silos is also typical of a society in the early stages of organization.

Another architectural issue which Mendenhall's and Gottwald's approach ignores is the problem of defense. Had the founders of the hill country sites come from the Canaanite polity, with its firmly established traditions of construction, we would expect them to build fortification walls around their settlements. Yet there is almost no evidence of genuine fortifications from early Iron I sites in the hill country. At most, the outer buildings of some of the sites were contiguous (details in Chapter 6).

Some aspects of the pottery of Israelite Settlement sites do suggest a certain relationship to Late Bronze ceramic traditions, but here we must emphasize two important factors that scholars have all too often neglected: regionalism, i.e., the local traits evident in pottery, and the quantitative distribution of the various types.

A resemblance to the pottery of the Late Bronze period is understandably most recognizable at sites near the coastal plain and the northern valleys, e.g., 'Izbet Şarţah adjacent to Aphek. On the other hand, the pottery of Israelite Settlement sites in the hill country is completely different from that of the Canaanite centers. Whereas the repertoire of Late Bronze types was rich and varied, the number of types found at Israelite Settlement sites in the hill country was comparatively small. But while Late Bronze pottery was uniform in appearance throughout the country, Israelite Settlement pottery was characterized by locally divergent subtypes.

These differences undoubtedly reflect the contrasting socio-economic situations of these two groups: an urban society bound together by commerce versus a dispersed and isolated tribal society. They also show that the links between the two cultures were not very strong. Even types which were thought to have developed from the preceding period, such as the cooking pot, manifested distinctly new traits. (In any case, some connection to the preceding culture, even in a newly established society, should be expected). Nor should we forget that the collared-rim store jar, which is the most characteristic type at Israelite Settlement sites in the hill country — comprising 35% of

the assemblage in some places — made its debut at this time (Chapter 7).

The inescapable conclusion is that the subject of Israelite Settlement, which involves the reconstruction of complex historical and demographic processes, cannot be discussed without a direct knowledge of at least one of the regions involved and without keeping abreast of the latest developments in archaeological field work. Recent studies on settlement patterns in different parts of the country in the Late Bronze and Iron I periods, as well as the accumulating data about the material culture of Israelite Settlement sites in the hill country, make it impossible to accept a theory claiming that the people responsible for Iron I settlement in the hill country came *directly* from the sedentary Canaanite society of the lowlying regions. Finally, another crucial point that is usually forgotten in the heat of the debate is the simple fact that no process of the type hypothesized by Mendenhall and Gottwald can be traced in any ancient Near Eastern source. To sum up, some of the points discussed above are stronger than others, but the general picture that emerges is what is of primary importance. Other points raised by the sociological school are valid, however, and we shall return to them later.³²

32 After this manuscript was ready for publication, Lemche's important book on *Early Israel* appeared (1985). Although large parts of his work are devoted to sharp criticism of Gottwald's *Tribes of Yahweh* (e.g. *ibid*: 407–410), Lemche basically agrees with almost all the views of the sociological school. He too seeks the origins of Israel in the socio-political situation in the Late Bronze period. From the 14th century BCE the hilly regions of the country were inhabited, in his opinion, by para-social elements who originated in the city-states of the lowlands. Since these groups were not sedentary, they are archaeologically invisible. Technological innovations in the beginning of the Iron Age made their sedentarization in the hill country possible (*ibid*: 416–432). The strongest and most impressive part of Lemche's research is the socio-anthropological data which has been incorporated into the book. On the other hand, the treatment of the archaeological material is artificial and insufficient.