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The Israel's origin theories

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the main theories conside-
ring the origin of Israel in relation to the basic sources of information,
that means: the two books of Tanach: the Book of Judges and the Book
of Joshua, and the extrabiblical sources: Egyptian texts and the ar-
chaeological evidence.

Both archaeological and social science disciplines attempt to
identify the origin of the Israelites once they settled in Canaan. As
a result we have many different theories or – better to say – hypothe-
ses, which try to give proper, scientific answer to that question. In this
presentation I would like to focus on the main, most significant for the
developing of our knowledge of the ancient Israel opinions.

The main Israel-origin theories

The most important and the best motivated theories can be grouped
into two categories depending on how they see the Israelites coming
into the land of Canaan, that means whether or not the Israelites
originally came from outside Canaan or from within Canaan.

I. "Outside-coming" theories

Between the "outside-coming" theories we find two especially
influential and important for the explanation of the emergence of
Israel. The first one is called "Conquest", the second: "Peaceful
Infiltration".

A. Conquest

The Conquest theory is founded basically on the first twelve chapters of the Book of Joshua, which present the primary interpretation of Israel's appearance in Canaan. According to that text the Canaanite cities were conquered and defeated by Joshua's soldiers during one long military campaign. Some archaeological evidences seem to confirm such an interpretation. For example, the destruction layer at Hazor, one of the major archaeological sites from the Late Bronze III period, point to the thirteenth century BC vast conflagration of the big city (Yadin 1985). But on the other hand, there are also many sites, which – although mentioned in the Book of Joshua as destroyed by the Israelites – do not show any archaeological evidence of destruction during this period of time. Actually we can note 19 sites with possible identification in the Book of Joshua (Dever 1992: 548), from which only two, Hazor and Betel, have evidence of destruction layers in the thirteenth century BC.

About the conquering of Hazor we read the following relation: "Joshua then came back and captured Hazor, putting its king to the sword... And they put to the sword every living creature there, because of the ban. Not a soul was left there, and lastly Hazor was burned. Joshua conquered all these royal cities and their kings and struck them with the edge of the sword because of the ban... Yet of all these towns standing on their mounds Israel burned none, apart from Hazor which Joshua gave to the flames" (Jos. 11: 10-13). In the next chapter we have the whole list of the kings, whom Joshua conquered "westward of the Jordan": together 31 kings (Jos. 12: 7-24). The biblical text and the archaeological evidence are then the same: one city, Hazor, was defeated and burned, and we have good archaeological evidence of it, but 30 other cities were probably only defeated without burning them, as we read in the Book of Joshua (11: 13), what is "negatively" proved by non-destruction layers in the thirteenth century BC excavated ruins of those cities. The Conquest theory has then in this example a good proof.

But there is a "small" problem with Jericho. In the biblical picturesque relation we read that "the people raised a mighty war cry and the wall collapsed then and there. At once the people stormed the town,

every man going straight ahead; and they captured the town" (Jos. 6: 20). According to that relation, the ancient Jericho had a wall, which collapsed during the Israelites' attack. But according to the archaeological evidence (established especially by Kathleen Kenyon and then proved by Bienkowski /1986/ during the recent studies of the excavation), there is virtually no clue for habitation on the site in the time of Israel's entrance into Canaan, whether we accept the earlier date of conquest (fifteenth-fourteenth cent. BC) or later (thirteenth-twelfth cent. BC). Instead, the examination of the site confirmed the existence of dwelling places in that time. More, there is also no evidence of any walls in Jericho of the time of Joshua, what in *nota bene* not only limited to Jericho, but encountered also in other Late Bronze Age major Canaanite sites (also some of the urban centers of the Middle Bronze IIA lack fortifications /Coote and Whitelam 1986: 34/). For example, neither Megiddo nor Hazor, although they possessed monumental gates during that period, had walls attached to them (Gonen 1984: 69-70). At least, the walls are still not found. Maybe the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua had destroyed a strong fortified palace in Jericho, what was in later tradition or even by the biblical author himself presented as a collapsing of the walls? Or maybe the ancient city from the time of Joshua is still unexcavated? Nevertheless, the lack of discovery of Late Bronze Age wall at Jericho cannot be a crucial argument against the historical value of the biblical story. According to A. Mazar (1990: 331), "the archaeological data cannot serve as decisive evidence to deny a historical nucleus in the Book of Joshua concerning the conquest of this city".

Similar problem as with Jericho we have also with Ai. The biblical text says, "Joshua prepared to march against Ai with all the fighting men. He chose thirty thousand men from among the bravest... The men in ambush... ran forward and entered the town; they captured it and quickly set it on fire... The number of those who fell that day, men and women together, was twelve thousand, all people of Ai... Then Joshua burned Ai, making it a ruin for evermore, a desolate place even today" (Jos. 8: 3-29). According to the text, Ai was a very big city with about twelve thousand inhabitants, against whom Joshua prepared all his bravest men, that means thirty thousand. The numbers try to prove the grandeur and the strategic importance of that city. But against these

facts the archaeological excavations testify that there was no Middle or
Late Bronze Age occupation in that place and the place itself has been
in ruin for a long time. The defenders of the Conquest theory (and
especially Albright) tried to solve this problem saying that the account
describing the destruction of the city was originally based on a descrip-
tion of a military battle with Betel and then by later tradition trans-
ferred into Ai, as well known kind of aetiology, in order to explain the
meaning of the name Ai, "ruin". We can really find a small trace of this
aetiology in the biblical text: "Then Joshua burned Ai, making it a ruin
for evermore, a desolate place even today" (8: 28). Maybe Ai was
actually a ruin in the thirteenth century but a ruin still inhabited and
with the still present Early Bronze Age wall, which could function as
"a stronghold for villagers in the region if attackers came up from the
Jordan Valley" (Millard 1985: 99). So, on the one hand, we have in the
biblical text an aetiological explanation of the name Ai, but on the
other hand, we touch the historical facts of destroying the city which
already had a form of ruin scarcely inhabited, what is proved by
archaeological evidence of the absence of Middle and Late Bronze
Age occupation.

The most important argument raised by some archaeologists
(Dever 1991: 83) against the warlike conquest of Canaan, as it is rela-
ted in the Book of Joshua, and the same against the Conquest theory,
is that the small villages which appear in the hill country of Canaan in
the twelve century BC and which are generally identified as an early
Israel, almost have no fortifications. Almost, because some of them,
like Khirbet ed-Dawwara and probably Giloh, had fortifications
(Finkelstein argues that the defense wall in Giloh should not be dated
before the mid-eleventh century /1990b: 197/, but it is quite possible
that the city had a kind of any fortification already earlier). According
to Finkelstein, Khirbet ed-Dawwara might function in the same way as
Ai, protecting in its walls the inhabitants of neighboring non-fortified
sites. Any way, two known examples of fortified cities are not suffi-
cient argument to defend the whole idea of Conquest theory when all
archaeological evidences speak up to date about small villages with the
lack of any fortifications. Probably, they did not need them, maybe
because there was no 'conquest-enemies'. So the Conquest theory as
an absolutely sure, unique and historically true model of interpretation

of the biblical texts as they were related in the Book of Joshua should be revised. The biblical "military" stories from the Book of Joshua should be understood rather as both aetiology and witness of monarchical tendencies to create the glorified history for the contemporaneous needs of the United Kingdom of David and Salomon.

B. Peaceful Infiltration

The second theory of the emergence of ancient Israel was proposed at the beginning of this century by two German scholars, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth (esp. Alt 1939) and continues still to enjoy influence (e.g. Fritz 1987, Rainey 1991). They suggested that the sources of Israel's origin should be sought between wandering seminomadic clans who peacefully "infiltrated" from the desert into the land of Canaan and then settled in the unoccupied hill country. As a result of a long time process, they were brought together by a group of God Yahweh worshippers, who also entered Canaan in the same time from the desert and perhaps from Egypt, into a loosely connected association of different tribes. These seminomadic groups populating the hill country, banding themselves more and more, grew strong enough to win dominance over the rest of the land, that means over the high-populated lowlands, what happened in the period of Monarchy.

This theory has many advantages, connecting logically and convincingly both the biblical and extrabiblical sources. According to the Book of Exodus, when the sons of Israel left Egypt, "people of various sorts joined them in great numbers" (12: 38). That sentence proves that not only "the tribes of Israel" wandered through the desert and then entered Canaan, but also non-Israelite people and that even in great number. This peaceful coexistence during the journey may be reflected later in the peaceful coexistence in the land of Canaan, what we can find in several examples: with the Midianites (Num. 25), with the Gibeonites (Jos. 9), with the Kenites (Judg. 4: 11; 1 Sam. 15: 6) or with other people called generally "strangers", who participated even in the religious ceremonies of the Israelites (Jos. 8: 33-35). The possibility of foreign, non-Israelite groups joining in with the sons of Israel

through the peaceful process testified in the Bible can fit quite well to the option of peaceful infiltration of the land Canaan by the Israelites themselves. As a proof, we have records of areas in the hill country, for example the region around Shechem, where – according to the Book of Joshua (8: 30-35; 24: 1, 32) – the Israelites settled, but there is no any account in the biblical text for conquering of that area. Just opposite, in the text 24: 32 we read that "the bones of Joseph... were buried at Shechem in the portion of ground that Jacob had bought for a hundred pieces of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, which had become the inheritance of the sons of Joseph". This biblical evidence speaks quite clearly about the peaceful coexistence between the Israelites and the non-Israelites and can attest the peaceful settlement in that region.

Also the extrabiblical sources seem to give evidence on behalf of the Peaceful Infiltration theory. First, they prove the fact that the earliest Israelite settlements were in the hill country and – second – they attest the continuous existence of seminomadic groups in the Fertile Crescent throughout history, living in symbiotic relationship with the settled inhabitants. These groups could surely move also into the hill country of Canaan and occupy it in peaceful coexistence with Israelite settlers.

From where came these groups? According to the recent increasing evidence they came from every direction, but especially from north, because of the collapse of the Hittites and the destruction of cities such as Ugarit. It may have stimulated northerners to migrate to the south, specially in the Jordan Valley, where in the last period of time we can find many archaeological and onomastic evidence proving the existence of northern influence in the fourteenth century (Hess 1989). For instance, the custom of burial in storage jars, which was characteristic for the last period of the Hittite empire, occurs also on the coast of the Mediterranean in Canaan and near the coast in Tell Nami, Tel Zeror and Azor; in the Jezreel Valley at Tell es-Saʻidiyeh (Gonen 1992: 22, 30, 142–144). All these evidences point to a presence in Canaan of other nonindigenous and non-Israelite peoples who could become later part of the Israelite population. Also in the Bible we find examples of it: in Hivite Shechem (Judg. 9: 28), in Hittite Luz/Betel (Judg. 1: 23, 26), in ethnic names ending in –zzi

(the Perizzites, e.g. Jos. 3: 10), and also in the name of Araunah from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24: 18; Mazar 1981).

Approximately in the same time as Israel's appearance in Canaan there were also other groups migrating from one place to another like Philistines and the Aramaeans. This can suggest that Israelite tribes could be one among many different groups wandering in the thirteenth century BC in order to find a new convenient place for settlement.

The main problem in the Peaceful Infiltration theory is always subtle "religious question". In the Bible we can find testimonies of the religious federation of Israelite tribes (generally called an amphictyony), based on the number '12' and on a common worship center – sanctuary. For example from the Book of Joshua (8: 30-35) we know that after conquering of Ai "Joshua built an altar to Yahweh the God of Israel on Mount Ebal as Moses, Yahweh's servant, had ordered the sons of Israel... On this they offered holocausts to Yahweh and offered communion sacrifices as well... After this, Joshua read all the words of the Law... in the presence of the full assembly of Israel, with the women and children there, and the strangers living among the people". In the last chapter of the same Book we read about the religious covenant between the Israelites and Yahweh which was made in Shechem: "Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem; then he called the elders, leaders, judges and scribes of Israel, and they presented themselves before God... That day, Joshua made a covenant for the people... Then he took a great stone and set it up there, under the oak in the sanctuary of Yahweh" (24: 1, 25-26). The question still open for the scientists is how these wandering from different directions seminomadic groups could form one people? Or how one group of Israelites coming out from Egypt and believing in one God could convince and unite all other groups wandering together or met already in the land of Canaan? Some scientists say that speaking about the amphictyony (the term imported from descriptions of tribal leagues in Classical Greece) in that period of time is anachronistic and incompatible with the evidence from the Bible and from archaeology (Gottwald 1979). Anachronistic it is indeed, but not incompatible with the Bible.

II. "Inside-coming" theories

Between the many contemporaneous theories or rather hypothe-
ses, which try from the sociological and psychological point of view to
explain the origin of ancient Israel, especially interesting are two of
them. The first one focuses on the peasant revolt as a main factor of
emerging of a new people, the second tries to find the origins of the
Israelites between the pastoral Canaanites. All of them underline the
"inside-coming" of Israel.

A. Peasant revolt

The base for that theory gave, although unwillingly, Mendenhall
(1983), who using the modern social sciences, suggested that the ori-
gins of Israel we should seek between the local inhabitants of Canaan
and their, in form of individuals and groups of dissatisfied people,
gradual movement into the hill parts of country. Already in 1970 he
wrote, "there was no real conquest of Palestine in the sense that has
usually been understood. What happened instead may be termed, from
the point of view of the secular historian interested only in sociopoli-
tical process, a peasants' revolt against the network of interlocking
Canaanite city-states" (cit. Silberman 1992: 28). His hypothesis was
then developed and, without the will of Mendenhall, changed by
Gottwald (1979) into a dramatic assault or even revolt of peasants
against "the oppressive Canaanite aristocracy which maintained its
cities at the cost of sizeable expenditures for defense in the form of city
walls, large buildings, and weapons, and for paying tribute to Pharaoh,
who was maintaining an empire in this land. Such expenditures would
come from the labor of the lower classes who may have been gradual-
ly dispossessed and turned into serfs and then into virtual slaves"
(Hess 1993: 129). Those social disturbances caused the significant
changes in the style of life, moving groups of local Canaanites toward
the hills where they could peacefully live in egalitarian, almost "com-
munistic" societies having everything common but without palaces,
large buildings and also costly walls, because in the hills, where the
chariots and other kinds of weapons of the Canaanite city-state armies

could not reach, the simple defenses were quite enough. Some very interesting traces of similar situations we can find in the Book of Joshua: "Joshua said to the House of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, 'You are a large population and one of great strength; you shall not have one share only but a mountain shall be yours; it is covered with woods, but you must clear it, and its boundaries shall be yours, since you cannot drive out the Canaanite because of his iron chariots and his superior strength' " (17: 17-18). The text above really says about the movement toward the hill country and about the settlement in that region, but the groups, who move, are groups of the House of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, that means the Israelites coming from outside the country and not local Canaanites. Also the main reason of movement is not "peasant revolt against the upper classes" or "inevitable social collision between village and town" (cit. Finkelstein 1990a: 678), but simply the large number of the Israelite tribe members: "Why have you given me for inheritance only one share... when my people are many because Yahweh has so blessed me?" (Jos. 17: 14).

Also the "egalitarian" character of hill communities, if it was really so, may have been caused rather by the scarcity of food and natural resources than by any ideology. So then this Gottwald's approach to the problem of the Israelite origin and application of Marxist models to explain a phenomenon from the ancient centuries we can doubtlessly call anachronistic. It is surely more anachronistic than the application of the amphictyony model from the time of Classical Greece to the thirteenth-twelfth century BC, what so severely Gottwald criticized.

The other argument cited from the Bible by the defenders of the Peasant revolt theory is that from the narratives concerning David we know that he was joined by many drifters and other dispossessed peoples when he fled from Saul. In the similar way the early Israelites were joined by many that found in the coexistence with them a more convenient community in which to live. But this approach clearly says that the early Israelites already were in the country as a precisely defined group if the others could join them. This argument then does not explain the origin of the Israelites.

Some of the variations in the Peasant revolt theory underline the importance of different factors in the appearance of Israel. According

to the one group of theorists the essential is the political factor: the decline of the Egyptian empire in Palestine. The others put more stress on the economic factor: "the growing frequency of drought", which "might very well have been largely responsible not only for the destruction of the most of Canaanite cities, but also for the creation in Canaan of detached groups of seminomads, refugee peasant farmers, and occasional bands of brigands who, together with a small contingent of escaped slaves from Egypt, would join to form the Israelite tribes" (Stiebing 1989: 186–187). Some very vivid reports of the chaotic political situation in Late Bronze Age Canaan give Tell el-Amarna letters, a collection of diplomatic correspondence between an Egyptian Pharaoh and various Canaanite princes from city-states. These cuneiform tablets discovered in Middle Egypt in 1887 mention frequently the activities of rebellious groups called 'apiru' on the frontiers of the land (Silberman 1992: 25).

Still other theorists see "the ups and downs in inter-regional trade" as a main factor in the emergence of Israel (cf. Coote and Whitelam 1986: 79). Since all those theorists insist that the basic elements to the constitution of the early Israel are non-religious and unrelated to the biblical accounts (Coote and Whitelam 1986; Strange 1987), then appears the question, what caused the unification of those quite different groups of peoples? Can the decline of Egyptian Empire be more creative than destructive? Can any economic problems consolidate the people more than separate and scatter them in order to find new places for living in the small rather than big communities? Why "the growing frequency of drought" should cause the people to settle in the hill regions of Canaan, which from their nature are already "sufficiently" dry? (Thompson 1992: 13). What, at the end, should we do with the many detailed biblical accounts speaking about the religious motifs of unification? Why should we believe them less than in the authors of many all the time changing and uncompleted theories? These questions remain without any logical explanation if we accept the Peasant revolt theory.

One of the factors, which support the Peasant revolt theory in the last decades, is different archaeological approach to the excavated data. Traditionally, any new cultural artifact was interpreted as a sign of a new culture and a new people. Following that, the archaeologists identified

particular types of house architecture, particular types of pottery and particular types of plastered cisterns as hallmarks of the new people Israel appearing in Canaan (Albright 1961: 341). Now it is clear that these types of material culture can be found also in earlier strata of archaeological sites (Mazar 1990: 338-348). For example, the "typical Israelite four-room house" has its antecedents in earlier Canaanite and Philistine dwellings and in nomadic structures as well (Schaar 1991; Dever 1991: 82), although Finkelstein (1988: 258-259) defends a different opinion, dating all such houses after 1150 BC and connecting them with the Israelite culture. He assigns the distinctive style of architecture to "the influx of settlers into the hilly regions of the Land of Israel at that time". But this kind of houses we can find in the lowland as well, for instance in Tel Qasile near present Tell-Aviv. Also "the only Israelite" collared-rim pithoi are actually seen as determinative for the early Iron Age Canaanite, Israelite and other cultures in Canaan and Trans-Jordan hill countries as well (Esse 1991; 1992: 103). The same what was said about the architecture and pottery we can say about the plastered cisterns. According to the archaeologists digging in the western slopes of the hill country, the plastered cisterns were in use already in the Middle Bronze II C Age (Finkelstein 1988-89: 144).

The dramatic re-evaluation in the dating of the material culture caused a new understanding on the line: a new cultural artifact = a new people. Generally, this approach is correct. But since the hallmarks of the supposed Israelite presence are not only Israelite but are earlier and since they are characteristic for the Canaan culture as well, then the origins of Israel should be sought between the local inhabitants of the land (the archaeology and the Bible attest then the West Semitic origin of the Israelites). Now then it seems to be quite accep-table to see the Israelites as the Canaanites who changed (because of some more or less explainable reasons) their places of settlement but did not change dramatically their material culture.

So then, the main conclusion which was made during the vast excavations in the last years in Israel was that "the material culture is distinctive to a particular region (i.e. the hill country), not necessarily to a particular ethnic group (e.g. Israelite rather than Canaanite)" (Hess 1993: 129).

The new approach to the data interpretation on the archaeological "courtyard" has brought many positive elements to our knowledge and understanding of the changes to which the ancient cultures were subdued but surely it doesn't give any serious evidence for the "peasant revolt" interpretation.

B. Pastoral Canaanites

The basic reason which cause the development of this theory was an interesting archaeological experience with the pattern of settlement during the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC throughout the land of Canaan. In the period before that time, when most scholars understand Israel to have appeared in the country, Canaan was characterized by a few larger city-states. But in the period after Israel's appearance, the whole hill country became occupied by many small villages. According to the surveys performed by Finkelstein (1988–89: 167), in the area allotted to the tribe of Ephraim there were only 5 sites occupied in the Late Bronze Age, and 115 small sites in Iron Age I. This alteration supposes some dramatic changes in the Canaanite society at that time, which not necessarily could be caused by external factors (the peaceful or warlike entrance of new groups of people). The artifacts examined by archaeologist don't show any new cultural form that must be traced from outside the land (Hess 1993: 131). In due to that a new theory of Israel's origin appeared, promulgated especially by Finkelstein, understanding the Israelites as originally Canaanites "after the shift in their living pattern".

According to that theory, the "converted" Canaanites didn't come from the Middle Bronze Age city-states but they lived already in the hill country. Some internal factors like population pressure, competition for scarce agricultural land or even political change in the administration of the Canaanite city-states caused them to abandon their villages in the Late Bronze Age and to wander about with their flock and herds from one pasturage to another in the regions located not in the midst of the desert, but especially in the hill country west of the Jordan River. "They lived in symbiosis with the settled populations of the large cities along the coasts and in the major valleys – presumably to

trade milk, meat, wool, and leather for agricultural produce"
(Silberman 1992: 30). At the end of the Late Bronze Age various cir-
cumstances like e.g. the droughts and the disruption of Egyptian hege-
mony in Canaan, caused many political and economical problems in
the life of local Canaanite societies (e.g. social disorder, the loss of the
grain surplus in the small sedentary communities in the hill country
/Finkelstein 1990a: 685/). As a result the wandering pastoralists were
compelled to settle again in small villages throughout the hill country
in order to produce food at least for themselves and for their flocks.
The excavations at Tel Masos showed the relatively high percentage
(26%) of cattle bones, what means that the new settlers were not pure
nomads but rather experienced stockbreeders (Dever 1993: 30). This
process of settlement touched first the eastern areas of the hill country,
because they were the best suited for cereals and pasturing. Then the
same settlement process followed in the western areas, which would
sustain horticulture.

The Pastoral Canaanites theory presented by Finkelstein has
a small modification in the opinion promulgated by Thompson (1992:
10-11), who argues that the highland settlers were not re-sedentarized
nomads-pastoralists but just lowland inhabitants dispersed eastwards
because of political and economical disturbances mentioned above
(because of these reasons some scientists prefer to place this theory
between the previous one and this one: Killebrew 1996/97). Both theo-
ries except few archaeological evidences (e.g. the large family tomb at
Dothan and cult center in Shiloh attesting the presence of the nomads),
are rather difficult to check and confirm but connected together may
explain the dramatic increase of the hill country inhabitants. The first
question however, mentioned already during the describing of the pre-
vious theory, is how to explain the sudden political and religious unity
of new inhabitants. The second question is, how to connect this theory
(theories) with the evidence of the Bible, the main written source
which we have in relation to Canaan, which generally underlines the
essential difference between them and the local Canaanites. Why the
Canaanites before "the shift in their living pattern", and the inhabitants
of the hill country after the period of droughts and the loss of the grain
surplus, could not be independent groups? The same cultural forms
may be characteristic for different groups of people as it was already

discussed above. Or maybe Israelite pastoralists and Canaanite pea-
sants would have been once members of the same big Canaanite
society? The Israelites as we know, are related ethnically to the West
Semitic presence which dominated Palestine and the eastern
Mediterranean at least before 1200 BC. This can explain quite easily
the cultural coincidence of both groups preserving their relative reli-
gious independence.

Conclusions

All the theories presented in this article try to explain in the best way
the origin of Israel. However, all of them have both their advantages
and disadvantages. No one gives the full answer for every question.
Some of them disregard the biblical sources, some of them don't ana-
lyze the newest archaeological evidence in its wide scope, finally some
of them don't pay enough attention to both biblical and archaeological
data, taking as the most important point of view the contemporaneous
social theories and adjusting them to the ancient times, relations, cul-
tures and customs.

On the other hand, even a careful analysis of all archaeological data
according to the most important factors as "environment, socio-eco-
nomic conditions, influence of neighboring cultures, influence of pre-
vious cultures and traditions brought from the country of origin"
(Finkelstein 1990a: 683), leads to conclusion that the material evi-
dence in general is not able to help in the solution of emergence of the
Israelites. Only architecture (excavations in 'Izbet Sartah, Giloh and
Beer-sheba), as the most "conservative", seems to testify that the Iron
I settlers in their main part came from a pastoral background as seden-
tarized local pastoral nomads (Finkelstein 1990a: 684).

Today there is a common scholarly consensus that there is a signifi-
cant cultural continuity between the Late Bronze and the early Iron Ages
and that the emergence of Israel in Canaan is to be explained largely "on
the basis of indigenous socio-economic changes rather than 'invasion
hypotheses' of any kind" (Dever 1993: 22). It means that the 'conquest
model' has now been almost completely discarded. The continuities
between LB and IA are recognizable mainly in technologies (ceramics)

and in language, what suggests that the early Israelites came from a Cana-anites background. But there are also some discontinuities, especially in type and distribution of settlement, demography, socio-economic struc-ture, or political organization. So then generally the scholars accept the opinion that "in 12th century BCE Canaan, there did exist, at least on the highland frontier, a new ethnic entity, which we can recognize in the archaeological remains, and which we can distinguish from other known ethnic groups such as 'Canaanites' and 'Philistines' " (Dever 1993: 24). As an interesting example of these "archaeological remains" we can men-tion the site excavated on Mount Ebal by Zertal (1986-87) where many fallow deer, sheep, goat and cattle bones were found near the place called 'altar'. All the animals in the context of the dietary regulations of early Israel (Deut. 14; Lev. 11) are permitted for consumption. Is it the place of Israelite cult with the Joshua altar (Jos. 8: 30-35)? According to Mazar (1990: 350) it is very probably (cf. also Stager 1991: 31), according to Killebrew – rather not (1996/97).

It seems that the 'ideal' theory dealing today with the emergence of Israel should connect and analyze all available data. Maybe the best solu-tion in the present stage of our Israel-origin knowledge would be to take the most convincing and motivated elements out of different opinions and to build one compact theory. It appears to me that in the new theory the first place should take elements from the Peaceful Infiltration model: the outside-coming, mainly from Egypt via Trans-Jordan, 'mixed-multitude' (Killebrew 1996/97), in which the groups of West Semitic, worshipping one God Yahweh, slaves from tribes of Ephraim/Benjamin and Manasseh ('House of Joseph') played the most important role. They entered the Land of Canaan in the same time as the other wandering seminomadic groups ("parasocial elements – nomads (among them the Sutu/Shosu) and Habiru – active in the hilly regions in the Late Bronze Age" /Finkelstein 1990a: 679/), looking for the good place of settlement. On the longue durée way of peaceful infiltration (but sometimes also by mili-tary campaign in competition for natural resources, in rivalry with other migrating nomads and with existing Canaanite city-states) they subdued the whole land, using the opportunity of political and economical distur-bances in Canaan. During the process of settlement, especially in the hill country, this 'mixed-multitude' entered in many relations with the local inhabitants, with dissatisfied elements from city-states, with Egyptian

'buffer groups' in Northern Palestine or 'apiru groups in Bashan and with re-sedentarized pastoralists as well, giving them new possibility of economic development in that period of instability or at least the protection against the pressure of still strong city-states. The firm religious connection of some groups known as 'House of Joseph' gave them enough strength to be the most consolidated and dominant among the 'mixed-multitude' and to convert finally into the one aware of its political diversity and unity nation called Israel. And this name occurs for the first time on a 'Victory Stele' erected by Pharaoh Merneptah in 1207 BCE with a special, identifying Israel as a people or ethnic group, determinative, "distinct from that assigned to place names for lands and from that assigned to place names for towns or city-states" (Hess 1993: 134). This name, in the interpretation of some scholars, in the form of depiction appears also on the Karnak Battle Reliefs from the time of Ramses II presenting Israel as a serious foe of Egypt, what suggests a relatively big military power of the Israelites at that period of time, power coming obviously from their unity.

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Abbreviations

ABD	The Anchor Bible Dictionary
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JNES	Journal of the New Eastern Studies
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament

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