Introduction

The terms *history* and *past* are often used as synonyms, although technically they are not. Since most of us presume there is only one world, we also assume there is only one past made up of a single succession of past states of this world. By contrast, history is a mental representation of narrow segments of the past. There surely is only one past; but there are many different histories, false ones and more correct ones, each reflecting different cultural contexts and different historians. History is a scientific enterprise whenever it processes representative data using rational and controllable methods to work out hypotheses and theories that are empirical, improvable through the application of recognized criteria of falsification.

Delimiting the Time-Span: from Merenptah to Bar Kochba

There are histories of Israel that begin with Abraham or David and continue until the "Exile" (586 BCE), Alexander the Great (333 BCE) or Bar Kochba (132–136 CE). Here, the limits are established by two documents.

Our starting point is provided by the stele erected in 1208 BCE by Pharaoh Merenptah, on which he recorded his victories in Canaan over the cities of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam and over a group named Israel (*CoS* 2.6; in *ANET* 376–378; Figure 1). Where in Canaan this Israel was to be found, what happened to it, and how much of it is reflected in biblical Israel is not easy to determine, but since the Merneptah stele is so far the earliest mention of the name Israel, it is a natural starting point for a history of Israel. Obviously, things happened before this beginning. Apart from the mythical beginning at Creation and the hypothetical beginning of the Big Bang, one may ask why a Pharaoh should have led military campaigns in Canaan. Answers can be found at various earlier points, but the most relevant one here is the presence between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea of a commodity coveted by Egypt and Assyria alike: copper.

Our closing point will be 136 CE, when four Roman legions crushed the revolt of Simeon Bar-Kosiba, later known as Bar Kochba, "Son of a Star." The document that establishes this date consists in the legends on the coins Bar Kosiba struck during the war with Rome: "Year one of the redemption of Israel," "Year two of the freedom of Israel," and "Simon Prince of Israel" (Mildenberg 1998, pl. 44). No coins bearing the name

Figure 1:   The upper part of Merenptah's Israel stele depicts in mirror image the Pharaoh receiving the sacred scimitar (Hebrew כידן, Josh. 8:18; 1 Sam. 17:6; Job 39:23; Jer. 6:23) from the god Amon under the winged solar disk. The Pharaoh also receives the blessing of the goddess Mut (left) and of the moon god Khonsu (right). The name 'Israel' is found in the second last line (after *ANEP* #342).

Israel would be struck again until 1948 CE. Bar Kosiba is thus the last ruler of a political entity using the name Israel in antiquity, closing a history that began in 1208 BCE. The various groups that claimed to be the real Israel after 135 BCE—Samaritans, Jews, and Christians—are indeed repercussions of the previous Israels, but as non-political entities they fall outside the history delimited here between 1208 BCE and 136 CE.

   The history of ancient Israel is commonly split into two: the history of the "First" Temple (until 586 BCE) and the history of the "Second" Temple (520 BCE–70 CE). The gap between 586 and 520 BCE is commonly described as a templeless period or the "Exile," which articulates the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. These designations are problematic, so we prefer a tripartite division centred on the concept of biblical Israel: the pre-history of biblical Israel, including the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the formation of biblical Israel in the Persian period, and, finally, the fragmentation of biblical Israel in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The first part corresponds to the times narrated in the bulk of the Hebrew Bible, except for Haggai, Zechariah, Psalms, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. The second part covers the period when the Hebrew Bible was finalized as a large narrative from Creation to the Persian era. Books that are only found in Greek and some Christian Bibles (Ben Sira and Maccabees, for instance) correspond to the last part.

Defining Terms

Israel

The term Israel covers different realities at different times, and it is the burden of historians to account for the differences, in contrast with the cultural memories of Judaism and Christianity, both of which stress continuity (Davies 1997). Israel was a Canaanite tribe in the late thirteenth century BCE, a tribal kingdom in the tenth century BCE, and a regional power in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. After the disappearance of the kingdoms, the population of the provinces of Samaria and Yehud that recognized the Torah was the Israel of the Persian era, which generated several religious groups—Jews and Samaritans and, later, Christians— in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[1] These groups spread across the empires that followed the Persians. Finally, a modern State of Israel was founded in 1948 CE, adding the western European notion of citizenship

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   1   In late antiquity, Islam became the form in which Jewish and Christian traditions were accepted on the Arabian Peninsula.

to the religious overtones conveyed by the term Israel. History must deal with each of the groups that claimed the title Israel for themselves.

History

History as an academic discipline deals critically with all available data in order to answer the fundamental questions of what happened, when, where, to whom and, equally important, why it happened (Knauf 2001a; Gaddis 2002; Swain 2006).

Besides the pattern of events, always somewhat hypothetical, historical inquiry seeks to determine *conjonctures* and structures in the ocean of the past. Events, *conjonctures* (a French word meaning circumstances used mainly in economics), and structures stand for the different velocity of change, from the most fickle aspect of events that can be overturned within the same day to structures that are most stable and evolve very slowly, such as climate. To retain the marine metaphor, structures are currents, while *conjonctures* are waves. Events are the foam that crowns the waves (Braudel 1972). A caricature of history would focus mostly upon events, listing the names of kings and the dates of the battles they won, dealing only with the foam and forgetting the mighty current and undertow against which the greatest individuals can do little to resist, even if they are kings. Winning a battle is no guarantee the war will be won. The challenge is to avoid taking an event for a *conjon:ture*. Hence, the rise and fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire is the *conjoncture* in which events such as King Jehu's coup and King Josiah's so-called reform occurred. It is against the backdrop of the slow transformations experienced by the Empire that the significance of local events in peripheral Israel and Judah can be assessed correctly. But *conjonctures* are themselves determined by the geographical structure, which, around the Mediterranean, establishes marked differences between plain and highland. The major climatic differences between plains and upland translate into marked differences in lifestyle, culture, and religion. In the Iron Age, the difference between lowland Canaan and Israel in the highland was structural. Three millennia later, the structure has hardly changed. The highland remains poorer and hardier than the coastal plain, but the *conjoncture* has changed. The lowland is now inhabited by people who call themselves Israel, while the highland, the cradle of Israel, is occupied mostly by Palestinian Arabs. Histories of Israel in antiquity have to take into account structures and *conjonctures* to interpret the events related in the Bible as much as modern historians have to take into account the geopolitical position of the Middle East (the structure) and the Cold War and its aftermaths (the *conjonctures*) to interpret the conflict between the modern State of Israel and its neighbours. Otherwise, one is blinded by daily events and mistakes a tree for a forest.

The Latin word *historia* gave two separate words to English: story

and history. As narrative, history, with its ideological premises, remains a literary scheme. The difference between what historians and authors of fiction write lies in their subject matter rather than in the truthfulness of their writings. In fact, fiction, especially when it is infused with mythological themes, conveys more truth than histories, in the sense that it deals with universals that are relevant across the ages. In the realm of truthfulness, historians are at a disadvantage, since their burden is trying to piece together what may have happened from scraps. When it comes to explaining why something happened, the hypothetical nature of the historian's work becomes even more blatant. In fiction, the image is the original itself, or, at least, it is an adequate representation of the truth it conveys, while in history, the narrative can only be a partial representation that can never come as close to the original as would a photograph. What actually occurred is long gone and has often left precious few traces. The historian's ability to write the past is limited by the amount of available relics as well as by the historian's own political and religious outlook. Scientific history is also a critique of political and religious stories and myths social groups construct to build their own identities and hopes. But historians do not work in isolation from their own context. As actors in the production of the social memory of the group to which they belong, historians write narratives about the past that are loaded with their authors' own ideologies (Halbwachs 1992). This fact adds to the difficulty of deconstructing the ideological constructs produced by past societies. When historians leave the level of reconstructing social and economic processes and address collective memory, myths, and legends, they can no longer hide behind the mask of scientific objectivity. Their deconstructions of past ideologies are themselves ideological constructs.

As an empirical social science, history had to get out of the ghetto of narrativity. Each narrative, whether intended as fictional or factional, creates a "narrated world" which is usually related to the real world of the narrators, but in a rather large number of possible ways and degrees of facticity. In postmodernism, the specious identification of "history" with "historical narrative" has led to the proclamation of "the end of history," because all narratives, conflicting as they are, are deemed equal in relevance (or rather irrelevance) (Evans 1997; Sokal and Bricmont 1999; Knauf 2011). By contrast, science feeds on quantitative data, and history has no problem with the plausibility and usefulness of such quanititative studies of humanity and of the worlds it has produced (Popper 1963, 1979).

As with any other science, scientific history operates "as though there is no God" (*sicut Deus non daretur*). This premise is particularly important when dealing with a religiously sensitive subject like Israel. The postulate "as though there is no God" does not imply that the historian is an atheist. It is a methodological starting point that forbids using miracles as evidence

or proof, although it does not necessarily imply that miracles never occur. Empirical science analyses what occurs in the world; in other words, in reality as we perceive it. As Ludwig Wittgenstein argued, "the world is everything that is the case" (Wittgenstein 1922, 29), and "God does not reveal himself *in* the world" (Wittengenstein 1922, 107). The historian can only speak of gods as human perceptions. Naturally, the Bible was written from an entirely different point of view, but the Bible is not a history in the modern sense. As a narrative in which God makes a lot of appearances, it is the defining myth of Israel and all who claim its heritage. By contrast, it is the duty of theology to remember and remind us that there is more to the world than what is "the case": "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp / Or what's a heaven for?" (Robert Browning).

History of Israel

History of Israel, being an academic branch of the scientific study of the Old Testament / Hebrew Scriptures, supplements the exegesis of individual biblical books or sections of books, to produce a general view informed by the wider context of the ancient Near East and organized along chronological and geographical lines.[2] We consider the History of Israel to be a productive tool for biblical exegesis and theology, given that the composers of the Holy Writ were children of their time. Because of the logic of its sequential arrangement, a History of Israel can serve to sum up or recapitulate the First Testament or Hebrew Bible, as can a "Theology of the Old Testament," except that it does not seek to distil a unified system. Because History of Israel is not the history of Israel only, it contributes to the overall contextualization of Israel and to a better understanding of the religions of Canaan as well as of the empires within which Judaism and Christianity arose.

As primary sources for the History of Israel, we have texts in the form of royal inscriptions, letters, records, and graffiti in Egyptian, Assyrian, Israelite, Judean, Moabite, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, as well as images. Written documents provide data beyond events that were considered worth reporting; they can also be mined for information on onomastics, prices, vocabulary, linguistic histories, and communication patterns. A second set of data is provided by the archaeology of relevant sites. Although archaeology retrieves only minimal amounts of ancient material, and even then lacks much of the context that would help make sense of it, it is an irreplaceable tool for the reconstruction of daily life. It sup-

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2   Seen from China, our European Near East is the Far West, but we take the Eurocentric designation as an inherent feature of the English language.

plies an ever-growing amount of quantitative data concerning the wealth of households, settlement patterns, food habits, the natural environment, trade networks, and imports. Meanwhile, iconographic depictions of the divine world provide our sole consistent database for the history of religion across the millennia (in the case of ancient Israel, see *IPIAO*).

Data is interpreted within the theoretical framework of cultural anthropology, including the geography of cultures and ethnology (Wagstaff 1985; Levy 1995). The living conditions and the organization of farming communities in late Ottoman Palestine are relatively well documented. They are useful guidelines for the structures that prevailed in biblical times, since the extent of climatic and geographic change over time is limited. The Nile still flows through Egypt, and the Central Palestinian Range has not moved. Ottoman- and Mandate-era studies are also a mine of information on *conjonctures*, once the modifications resulting from the introduction of modern techniques are taken into account. Even the present geopolitical position of Syria-Palestine is relevant to the History of Israel: besides Egypt, the other regional heavyweights, Iraq and Turkey, are heirs of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Hittites of old. Analogies can also be drawn from ethnological studies of nomadism and of life in the desert fringes of the Middle East.

To organize the mass of relevant data, we use the basic principles derived from Cultural Materialism (Harris 2001) and World-systems Theory (Wallerstein 1984), which examine ways in which humans tend to act according to what they perceive as being in their best interest. We also make use of the distinction between centre and periphery.

Our interpretation of data is shaped by a distinction between primary and secondary sources, made according to the amount of interpretation incorporated into the data conveyed by any given source, rather than whether the data is factual or not. Information drawn from archaeology involves a lot of interpretation, although based on inherently silent vestiges such as walls, bones, and ceramic. Yet, compared with eloquent sources such as texts, a certain amount of background noise needs filtering before texts can be assessed correctly. Hence, the development of archaeology has altered the status of the Bible as a source for the reconstruction of Israel's past. For a long time, biblical narratives used to be the only source for many periods. Now, the Bible is one among several sources. Other texts have come to light, sometimes from Israel's enemies, transmitting a different point of view of the same events, which shows that all literary texts are secondary sources as far as events are concerned. History is not found as such in the texts. The ideology of the texts needs to be deconstructed before history can be constructed (Wellhausen 1885). At first sight, the evidence provided by the silent witnesses of the past that archaeology reveals appears more straightforward, requiring less

decoding. They qualify as primary sources. Caution, however, is required, as biblical archaeology arose in reaction to Wellhausen's understanding of biblical history: the pioneers of biblical archaeology sought to recover concrete evidence that would prove that the Bible was right after all. The results went quite contrary to expectations, which, by itself, is a token of the scientific quality of the work accomplished. Many genuine discoveries were serendipitous. As the number of excavated biblical sites grew, so the database expanded. Pottery sequences could be established and progressively refined through ^{14}C analyses of organic material recovered from the same strata.

Martin Noth (1960) and Herbert Donner (1984–1986) primarily used archaeology to write their histories of Israel for early periods about which the Bible is silent. But with the biblical record of the reigns of David and Solomon, even critical historians believed they possessed sources that were contemporary to the events they recorded and were thus reliable primary sources. The excavations of Solomon's stable cities mentioned in 1 Kings 9 were accepted as providing final proof of the historicity of the biblical Books of Samuel and Kings.

Today, the stories in Samuel and Kings are considered to have been written centuries after the deaths of the kings they discuss, because they depict a world that differs greatly from the one that archaeology for the period has reconstructed. As archaeology revealed the similarities between the material culture of Israel and that of its immediate neighbours, historians changed their view of Israel's status in the ancient Near East. Martin Noth still claimed that the task of the historian of Israel was to reveal Israel's uniqueness from neighbouring cultures. Although Israel lived and behaved like the surrounding people, it was a stranger, separated from the world by its very being (Noth 1960, 2–3). The histories written during the following decades devoted increasing attention to the broader Near Eastern context, searching more for analogies rather than particularities.

The changing approach to the texts produced by Israel resulted from a new understanding of the difference between primary and secondary sources: primary sources tell too little, while secondary sources are too loquacious. Both require interpretation, but there is a difference between a piece of papyrus that records that no bricks were delivered on a day designated "Sabbath" (Tcherikover and Fuks 1957, 10) and a biblical text claiming that God commanded Israel to do no work on the Sabbath (Exod. 16:23). The papyrus in question is the earliest attestation of the ban on work, but it was written a millennium later than when the god of Israel is supposed to have dictated the Ten Commandments to Moses, and by someone whose primary concern was to keep exact records. The scribe's sole concern was to avoid trouble from his superiors, and he did not note

whether the brickmakers he was in charge of were Jews, or what kind of Jews they might be—questions irrelevant to him but crucial to the historian. Nor was the delivery record destined for posterity. It is by mere chance that we can read it today. By contrast, the biblical text is the result of a long process of composition and canonization for transmission to posterity in order to sustain the identity of its re-readers and weld them into a religious community. The Jewish scribes who penned the Bible succeeded beyond their expectations in transmitting a text that became the basis of three major world religions. We can take the date supplied by the Egyptian scribe almost at face value, but we cannot do so with the biblical claim, because to assert that God spoke to Moses face-to-face breaches the limits imposed by the premise of *sicut Deus non daretur*. Contrary to the Egyptian records, that, for the most part, fail to provide information of interest to the historian of Israel, the biblical text says far too much. Its claims have to be downsized, while the historian can hardly avoid over-interpreting the meaning of the brick delivery. Eventually, however, both primary and secondary sources have to be integrated into a coherent picture to produce a history of Israel.

The various histories of Israel on the market today can be evaluated on how they differentiate between primary and secondary sources. The still-current history by Miller and Hayes (2006 [1977]) is less factual than the work of Grabbe (2007b), which has turned the primacy of the biblical text over archaeology on its head. Yet, biblical archaeology does not supply purely objective data. The study of the past cannot be disentangled from the present. Even when digging an Early Bronze layer, an archaeologist of the Near East can hardly ignore fighting occurring not too far away. Archaeologists are also citizens, and those who are citizens of democracies are called on to vote. They may belong to a progressive or a conservative university. Archaeologists also need funds provided by agencies that have their own agendas, which necessarily influences which personnel and sites are chosen. Hence, modern ideologies invite themselves into the debate; labels such as Zionist, Evangelical, or Materialist convey a certain amount of truth that cannot be ignored, although they are quite often used in a derogatory manner to disqualify opponents and rivals.[3]

Confidence in the ability of dating any biblical text with precision through literary and redaction criticism has declined dramatically among the recent generation of exegetes. Much of the production of the Hebrew Bible is today assigned to the Persian and early Hellenistic era, half

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3   "Minimalist" and "maximalist" are polemical designations, more revealing about the person who uses them than about the person spoken about.

a millennium later than the reign of Solomon that was once viewed as the Golden Age of biblical production. This down-dating has definitively removed the biblical texts from the category of eyewitness accounts. A narrower timespan, comprised of between the sixth and the second centuries BCE, has eliminated much of the once fashionable speculations of verse-by-verse reconstructions of the composition of biblical texts and the search for the exact circumstances that led to the various additions. Certainly, some traditions like the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 go back to the ninth century BCE, if not earlier, and underwent several stages of redaction and expansion during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, but the once common belief that each stage could be identified within the final text is now mostly rejected. The notion of "Scripture" or of the Pentateuch as "Law" did not arise before the Persian period. The collection designated as the Historical Books in the Greek and Latin Bibles is no earlier. It does not correspond to a history, despite the all-too-common habit of referring to it as the "Deuteronomistic History." The synchronized chronology of Israelite and Judean kings in 1 and 2 Kings began as a chronicle based on earlier material, while the other texts in Samuel and Kings are short stories and are mostly secondary insertions (Kratz 2005, 158–186; Grabbe 2007a). Historiography is more fitting a title for Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles, produced in the fourth and third centuries BCE, although their reliability as historical sources is limited. First Maccabees imitates Kings, while Esther, Judith, and Tobit are novellae which play with history rather than write history. Only 2 Maccabees follows the rules of Hellenistic historiography.

The annals of the Neo-Assyrian kings (Luckenbill 1924; Grayson 1991, 1996; Tadmor and Yamada 2011), the Babylonian Chronicles (Grayson 1975; Glassner 2004), and royal Persian inscriptions (Kent 1953) are the main extra-biblical literary sources for the Israels of the ninth to sixth centuries BCE, most of them now available in reliable publications. These texts must be interpreted in light of the "Tiglath-pileser principle" (Halpern 2001, 124–129): because they addressed their inscriptions to the gods, they could not lie, but they did not tell the whole truth. One must read between the lines to recover the facts. According to their annals, the great kings always won, but mapping the locale of the "victories" allows a fairly accurate assessment of their significance. A series of victories sited ever closer to home betrays a pattern of successive defeats.

A middle course will be followed here between two extreme positions. Radical sceptics, often called "Minimalists" by their opponents, consider all texts to be false unless proven otherwise, while those in turn described as "Maximalists" regard all ancient texts as telling the truth unless there is strong reason to suppose otherwise. Underlying these two extremes are different views on the nature of the Bible: a cultural product for the Mini-

malist position, and the careful record of honest authors for the Maximalist camp. Factuality lies in between, but where exactly is never certain. No statement is ever one hundred per cent correct, and there is rarely enough evidence to make an irrefutable case (Moore 2006).

Identifying a narrative's bias or how a writer has spun the evidence helps to construct a more balanced picture of historical reality. One example here is the biblical depiction of David as a great king, and of Saul as a failure.

Defining Notions

Time

Attributing dates to individuals and events is the first task when producing a history, although this is particularly challenging when it comes to the history of the ancient world. Besides the use of different calendars, kings with the same name are not easy to differentiate and the sources are always lacunary.

The first period ever calculated continuously from a fixed point was the Seleucid era. Its starting point was the return to Babylon of Seleucus I Nicator following his exile in Ptolemaic Egypt, which the Seleucids regarded as the foundation date of their empire. According to the Babylonian calendar, the Seleucid era began from a date during 311 BCE, although in the Macedonian calendar, which was observed in Asia Minor and Syria, the start corresponded with a date in 312 BCE. The biblical Books of Maccabees reckon dates according to the Seleucid era, as the Yemenite Jews do to this day. Before this, years were dated according to reigns. In Egypt, when pharoah B took over from pharoah A, scribes numbered the year as Year 1, but not always indicating to which pharoah it referred. Meanwhile, in Mesopotamia, Year 1 began on the New Year that followed the accession of a new king. The problem here is that we do not have the entire sequences of kings or pharoahs, or the duration of their reigns. Consequently, there are gaps and scholars have devised long, medium, short, and very short chronologies. For instance, Hammurapi of Babylon probably ruled either from 1792 to 1750 BCE (medium chronology) or, more likely, from 1728 to 1696 BCE (short chronology). But according the very short chronology, he ruled between 1696 and 1654 BCE, while the now defunct long chronology had him reign between 1848 and 1806 BCE (Gasche *et al.* 1998). However, records of eclipses and other astronomical phenomena mean that it is possible to create a more reliable absolute chronology for Mesopotamia than for Egypt. In this book we adopt the short chronology for Egypt (Hornung 1999).

In Israel and Judah, the situation is even more complicated. It is not clear whether the accession year was determined according to Egyptian or Mesopotamian usage (see above), whether Israel and Judah used the same system, or if the system was changed over time. Co-regencies are further

complications. For instance, it is not certain whether the regnal years of Manasseh include the years he ruled with his father Hezekiah (2 Kings 20). Whether dates were reckoned from the spring New Year, around the vernal equinox, or from the New Year at the autumn equinox adds another six-month uncertainty. Hence, there is no absolute chronology for successive reigns. According to 1 Kings 12:32, it seems that, at times, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel used different systems, but little is known about which calendar they followed. It is not possible to be sure even whether the best attested calendar of the Bible, the sabbatical or 364-day calendar, was ever used. Intercalation is yet another problem, since all calendars, except for the Islamic, intercalate days in order to keep in step with the seasons, months, or years at strict or variable intervals. Hence, different scholars have produced different chronologies for the biblical kings (Miller and Hayes 1977, 678–683; Thiele 1983; Hayes and Hooker 1988; Galil 1996). Nebuchadnezzar stormed Jerusalem for the first time in 597 BCE, but he destroyed it in 587 or 586 (here we choose 586). There is a two-year uncertainty for the death year of King Manasseh, but the regnal dates of the last three kings of Judah are firm. We will mention both the highest and lowest dates, for instance for Omri 886/876–875/869 BCE (see Appendix). Rather than learning these dates by heart, the reader should learn to situate each king in the correct century.

Besides the political chronology, archaeology uses a succession of "ages" that have much broader delimitations. Dates obtained through ^{14}C analyses are expressed by a date within two brackets. Hence, 875 ± 15 means, with a probability of 68%, between 890 and 860 BCE. The duration of transitional phases between different ages varies from region to region, as cultural innovations do not spread evenly across space. It used to be common to organize the chronology of cultures along political lines. Beginning around 1200 BCE, the settlement of the highlands and the formation of Israel were defined as Iron Age I. Iron Age II began around 1000 BCE with the rise of King David and the consolidation of the kingdom of Israel.

Today, the cultural sequence is established by the pottery assemblage that characterizes each phase. Here, we take it as an established fact that the "low chronology" (Knauf 2000b; Münger 2005; Finkelstein *et al.* 2011) has been vindicated by a series of ^{14}C samples from different sites. However, as the traditional chronology remains current in many handbooks, Table 1 sets both chronologies side by side.

The new chronology entails transitional phases of some 25 years. The full impact of Hellenism was not felt before the second century BCE in Palestine, half a century after the conquests of Alexander the Great. The beginning of Roman rule over the Near East in 63 BCE had no immediate impact on the local Hellenistic culture.

Table 1. Traditional and low chronologies.

Era	Traditional chronology	Low Chronology
Late Bronze IA	1550–1450	1550–1450
Late Bronze IB	1450–1350	1450–1350
Late Bronze IIA	1350–1250	1350–1300/1275
Late Bronze IIB	1250–1200	1300/1275–1250/1225
Late Bronze III	unattested	1250/25–1125/1100
Iron IA	1200–1130	1125/1100–1050
Iron IB	1130–1000	1050–1025
Iron IC	unattested	1025–950/925
Early Iron IIA	1000–	950/925–875
Late Iron IIA	–925	875–800/775
Iron IIB	925–750	800/775–725/700
Iron IIC	750–586	725/700–575/550
Persian	539–333	575/550–300/250
Hellenistic	333–63	300/250 BCE–25/125 CE
Roman	63 BCE–323 CE	25/125 CE–

Space

Engaging the history of Israel requires a good understanding of the geography of the region. From west to east, at the latitude of Jerusalem, the plain along the Mediterranean coast was the domain of the Philistines in the south and of the Phoenicians in the north. Then comes the Shephelah, a region of low rolling hills rising steeply towards the central ridge on which Jerusalem sits at an altitude of over 800 m. Continuing eastward, the relief drops extremely sharply to the western coast of the Dead Sea (423 m below sea level), the lowest point on the Earth's surface. The Judean desert is the area between the central ridge and the Dead Sea. From the eastern coast of the Dead Sea, the altitude rises again sharply to the Moabite plateau. From north to south, the mighty Mount Hermon (over 2,800 m) closes the Jordan depression, which flows towards Lake Kinneret and the Dead Sea. West of the Jordan, the Lebanon range slopes down southwards into the Galilean hills as far as the narrow Jezreel Valley that runs from Beth-She'an to the Bay of Acco. South of the Jezreel Valley, on the west, is the Carmel range and then the Sharon plain. Inland the relief rises again to form the Central Palestinian Range—the Israelite and then Samarian cradle—that continues southwards into the Benjaminite plateau opening onto the high point of Jerusalem and then dropping gradually past Hebron as far as the lowlands of the Negev and the Beersheba Valley, a natural corridor between north Arabia and Gaza. Reflecting the topography, the hygrometry is extremely

contrasted. The upper Jordan basin, the sandy coastal plain and the Jezreel Valley were swampy during periods of heavy deforestation. Lake Kinneret is the largest body of freshwater in the entire region. Halfway between the Kinneret and the Dead Sea, the Jordan receives the waters of the Jabbok (Arabic *nahr ez-zerqā* "Blue River") that come down from the Ammonite plateau. The Arnon (Arabic *wādī el-mūǧib*) flows from the Moabite plateau down into the Dead Sea. South of the Dead Sea, the *wādī el-ḥasā* separates Moab and Edom before contributing its meagre flow to the southern tip of the Dead Sea. Also south of the Dead Sea, the Arabah depression continues down to the Red Sea, as part of the Great Rift Valley that spans 6,000 km from the Taurus in modern Turkey south to Lake Malawi between Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania. At the level of the Jordan Valley and the Arabah, the Arabian and Mediterranean tectonic plates collide at a speed of 2 cm per year, with much seismic activity. The western side of the Central Range benefits from the humidity brought by the Mediterranean, but the Central Range acts as a barrier that leaves little rain for the Judean Desert. In the southern Jordan Valley, some oases like Jericho depend on springs. On the other side of the Jordan River, the Golan—with its extinct volcanoes, the Hauran (biblical Bashan), and its fertile basaltic soils —and the hills of Gilead are better watered. As a general rule, rain levels decrease from north to south and from west to east. In the south, the Negev marks the limit of dry cultivation (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977; Karta 1985; Khalidi 1992; Krämer 2002).

The large range of altitudes and rain-levels within such a restricted territory (barely 100 × 250 km) produces dozens of ecological niches belonging to no less than four climatic zones: the Mediterranean in Galilee, Samaria, and Gilead; the Irano-Turanian in the Negev and Lower Jordan Valley; the Saharan in the Arabah; and the Sub-tropical, for instance in the Jericho oasis. Agricultural production is equally diverse. In the mountains olives, grapes, and almonds dominate. The valleys and plateaus are suitable for dry grain cultivation until precipitation falls below the 250 mm isohyet in southern Negev and east of the narrow Moabite and Edomite fringes (Figure 2: 250 mm isohyet). The sandy coast between Gaza and Acco offers but poor shelters for navigation. Acco, Dor, and Jaffa are the main harbours in the north, while Ashdod and Ashkelon were the natural outlets for the produce of the Judean hills.

The climatic diversity is reflected in the ethnography, which is as diverse as could be. The area is a matrix for cultural plurality that works against consolidation into a single political entity. The modern State of Israel is a patchwork of ghettos built from massive immigrations from Europe, North Africa, the Soviet Union, the USA, and the Middle East; the diasporas feel little affinity with each other. On the Palestinian side, the genesis of a common identity has not progressed much since the 1930s.

Figure 2: 250 mm isohyet (T. Guillaume).

Had it been sited in a place less coveted by mighty neighbours, Israel/Palestine could have become another Switzerland, a place where, after 550 years of civil war (1291–1847 CE), small groups eventually managed to cohabit peacefully, with each continuing to use its own dialect and religion to mark its difference from its immediate neighbours rather than building a common identity. Like Switzerland, Israel/Palestine is a periphery over which the zones of influence of several powerful neighbours overlap. From the fourth millennium BCE, Canaan, the Egyptian designation for Israel/Palestine, was where Egypt obtained wood, copper, olive oil, wine, and slaves. Commercial relations between Egypt and Canaan were like the relationship between a first- and a third-world country. In return for raw materials, Egypt, followed later by Assyria and the Phoenicians, supplied luxuries that strengthened the status of subservient local elites. Israel/Palestine was also a crucial land bridge, a passage between the great centres of the region, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Hence, it was a thoroughfare for goods exchanged between the Nile and the Euphrates as well as for imperial armies marching against one another. As was the case in the second millennium (Late Bronze Age), the Mediterranean world became a third actor in Israel/Palestine along with Egypt and Mesopotamia. The eighth century BCE saw the arrival of Arabia as a fourth actor, using Israel/Palestine for what became known as the incense road towards Gaza and Damascus. Ever since, Israel/Palestine has remained open on all sides.

Roads, therefore, are Israel/Palestine's greatest asset, resulting from the area's physical geography, which has hardly changed across the millennia. Even the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 CE strengthened rather than

weakened the strategic position of Israel/Palestine. The canal redirected the traffic between Asia and Europe through the Red and Mediterranean seas. The Via Maris "Road of the Sea" (Isa. 8:23; Mt. 4:15) connected Egypt to Syria by following the northern coast of the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean coastal plain towards the Carmel. It took a shortcut through the Nahal "Iron Pass" guarded by Megiddo, into the Jezreel Valley, following its easy terrain down to the Kinneret, where it followed the upper Jordan Valley to cross the river halfway before Lake Huleh. Across the Jordan, the Via Maris climbed towards the Golan Heights before reaching Damascus. From the Via Maris, four connections branched off in an East–West direction. From the Jezreel Valley one could cross the Jordan south of Lake Kinneret at the level of Beth-She'an towards Pella and the Ammonite Plateau. Before the "Iron Pass," one could reach Shechem and travel down again through Wadi Far'a to the Jabbok, or more to the south through Jerusalem or Gibeon towards Jericho, crossing the Jordan above the Dead Sea to reach the Moabite plateau. These passages were active during the Bronze Age. During the Iron Age, the crossing south of the Dead Sea opened a southern connection between the Via Maris at Gaza and the "King's Way" (Num. 20:17, 21), as the Assyrians called it. The King's Way ran north–south parallel to the Via Maris across the Transjordanian Plateau, meeting the Via Maris at Damascus in the North and at Elat in the South. After the annexation of the Nabatean kingdom in 106 BCE, this road became the Via Traiana from Bostra to Aila and continued to Hegra.

As geography represents space as maps, the present volume includes a number of maps to guide readers through space, though mapping the physical geography of Israel/Palestine is a recent phenomenon. Geographical maps do not reflect the way ancient or modern populations experience space, nor the way they orient themselves to where they live. While most editions of the Bible include maps, the Bible itself transmits mental maps that represent another aspect of space. The mental maps of the Hebrew Bible use the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean as markers of the eastern and western sides of Canaan, but when it comes to the southern and northern sides, the transposition of "borders" runs into inextricable problems. Biblical passages disagree with each other and the vague points mentioned in the text hardly allow one to trace a coherent line on a map. It was the British Empire that introduced modern cartography in the Levant and improved the methods used by the Ottomans to describe and register land and territories (Mundy 1986, 78). Modern cartography established precise geodesic points that are irrelevant to mental maps. Hence, the maps found in most Bible editions are as misleading as they are useful. As a result, modern cartography has opened an unbridgeable gap between the inaccuracy of textual descriptions and the expectations of modern readers (Lissovsky and Na'aman 2003, 320). Even if cartogra-

phers avoided rendering frontier areas as lines, maps would nevertheless remain over-simplifications, since space in the ancient world was represented as lists of cities on royal inscriptions, rather than taking the form of maps (Smith 2003, 112–148). While the history of Israel requires the study of maps to remedy the lack of direct experience of the geography of Israel/Palestine as it was lived on foot and donkey-back, cartography cannot reproduce mental maps or, even less, tribal territories that reflect identity rather than administrative realities. Geography is only one way to describe space.

The difference between the administration of natural resources and the administration of identity corresponds to the difference between politics and economics, two related spheres that are not to be confused. Both place expectations and duties on their constituencies, but their spheres of influence rarely coincide. Today, Levantine villages are composed of more than one religion and clan because, as a rule, they are much larger than the corresponding settlement type in antiquity. Yet, not all combinations are possible. For instance, in Lebanon Sunni and Shi'a Muslims coexist only in cities and rarely in the same quarters. Muslims and Christians cohabit at village level, but not every denomination of Christians live in the same village. Orthodox Christians and Protestants have little or no place in Maronite villages. Orthodox churches are prominent in the lowland with Sunnis, while the mountains serve as a refuge for minorities: Alawites in the Gebel Ansarye in Syria. In Lebanon, the Qadisha Valley and the Metn are the traditional refuges for the Maronites, the Shouf for the Druzes, and the Gebel 'Amal for the Shi'a. Despite the demographic explosion of the last centuries and the profound population redistribution caused by the creation of the modern State of Israel, the Levant is not an American-style melting-pot. Pockets of ancient identity resist, such as Circassian villages and Sunni wadis in Galilee. The Jewish population is itself resettling into separate ghettos, with Orthodox in Jerusalem, Mizahis and Francophones along the northern coast, and Russians on the southern coast.

Peasants, Urbanites, and Nomads
The combination of space and time into a physical continuum illustrates how humans associate with each other and with the rest of their natural environment. They create a worldview that turns the chaos of crude representations of reality into an ordered and manageable whole.

The social reality of the ancient Near East, and in some measure of the modern Near East as well, can be illustrated through three different survival strategies represented by the categories of the farmer, the urbanite, and the nomad (Sussnitzki 1966; Rowton 1973, 1977; Herzog 1997). These three are not present at all times, but they keep reoccurring in various combinations for the rational division of labour under the prevalent *conjoncture*.

Parallel to the selection of wild grains for cultivation, the domestica-
tion of animals enabled human groups to survive major climatic changes
and adapt to previously hostile ecological niches. Farmers raised goats and
sheep, cattle, donkeys, and pigs; as a result, they became less dependent
on protein obtained through hunting. The camel was kept for its milk from
the third millennium BCE in some parts of Arabia and became a pack ani-
mal in the second millennium. From the ninth century BCE, camel-riders
appeared as warriors in parallel with horse riders in the north (Figure 3)
where, throughout the second millennium BCE, horses were used only to
propel chariotry (Bulliet 1977; Betts 1992; Levy 1995).

Figure 3:   Arab camel-rider with lance. Palmyra, second century CE. The riding
position indicates that the rider is sitting on a *šadād* saddle. Attesta-
tions of this kind of saddle on Achaemenid and Roman coins are doubt-
ful (after Drijvers 1976, pl. LXV).

After the farmer arose the nomad, or rather the first type of nomad
(here called "type 1"). Once farmers occupied the most favourable loca-
tions, close to reliable fresh-water springs and arable land, the human
population grew faster than farmers' ability to clear the more difficult
land. Exploiting the huge tracks of wasteland, in which villages were but
tiny islands, remained more profitable than building terraces around the
villages. As long as the human population was small enough to leave the
wasteland largely underexploited, the farming communities relegated the
exploitation of the wasteland to type 1 nomads. These nomads special-
ized in tapping the wasteland beyond the immediate reach of the villages,
rather than working their fields, although they never entirely abandoned

a farming lifestyle since they were an extension of farming villages. This type was the only type of nomadism found during the third and second millennia BCE (Köhler-Rollefson 1987).

Before we turn to the other types of nomads, we must focus on the farmers and the structure of their villages. Huddled closely on a natural outcrop for mutual protection against winds, sun, and predators, their houses were surrounded by a belt of walled gardens, the domain of women (Song of Songs). The gardens combine vegetables, pulses, and trees, olives, figs, pistachios, and almonds, which represent long-term investments requiring stability in order to obtain a return. A second belt is formed around the village by the arable land (*'adamah*) used for dry cultivation of grain, mostly barley and wheat. The third circle is the grazing land, either the arable land left uncultivated (*sadeh*) or the *midbar*, a word usually rendered "desert" although it means "drove," the place where the herds and flocks of the village are driven by children or men, since the safety and honour of women cannot be guaranteed in the open field (Deut. 22:25). Genesis 2–4 depicts two of these circles, omitting the crowded and unsanitary village, selecting the garden as the locale for paradise, where the woman is most at ease. The other space is the place of punishment. Ploughing and harvesting make the fields the place of sweaty brows, and make the driving of animals over the *midbar* a relative pastime (Wagstaff 1985).

The bones of wild animals recovered in ancient villages show that the limits of the cultivation potential of Israel/Palestine was not reached even at the end of the nineteenth century CE, despite the dramatic population increases during the Roman and Late Ottoman periods, resulting in an overall population of one million inhabitants. It is only with the 10 million inhabitants of the present day that the water resources of the region have become over-exploited. Most of the inhabitants of any given village are interrelated, despite the prevalence of farmer mobility as a strategy to overcome various constraints. Strangers are soon integrated, since the well-being of villages continues to depend heavily on the size of their workforces. In the absence of machines, all activities were done by hand and apart from a few donkeys, cows, and camels to pull the plough and carry loads, every man, woman, and child was mobilized for the harvest. Villages were and are also related to others nearby in a network of blood ties resulting from exogamy and a hierarchy of settlements in which larger villages assumed administrative and commercial functions for their periphery. Under the constraints of the geographical structure, satellite villages were grouped around a primary centre situated downhill, towards which trickled surpluses and taxes (Sugerman 2009). A similar hierarchy operated until surpluses reached the closest harbour or marketplace on one of the great commercial highways. Returns made it uphill as luxury goods and credit supplied by traders who owned stores in urban centres (Figure 4).

Figure 4:   Fresco from Beni Hassan showing Canaanites bringing copper ingots to Egypt (indicated with arrows), Middle Kingdom (after Lepsius 1859, pl. 133).

These urban centres, the size of the villages of today, were the places where surpluses were stored and dispatched to be transformed into commodities other than consumables used for immediate survival. As the locations of writing, used to record taxes and stock-keeping, cities were the cradle of statehood, in the form first of city-states and later as territorial states. Hence, the rise of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah is concomitant with the spread of writing, beginning respectively in the ninth and eighth centuries. At every level, one family held a commanding position expressed through a larger house and other status symbols such as the donkeys ridden by the sons in Judges 10:4 and 12:14. Village communities were not inherently egalitarian, unless poverty is taken as shared equally. The slightly higher status granted to the local chief entailed a greater share of the communal burden to assume representational responsibilities towards the outside and regulatory functions within, arbitrating conflicts and taking the final decision in communal affairs. But for the rest, the daily routine of the family was run along private lines.

Major differences in altitude within short distances enabled farmers to tap different stages of vegetation, sending animals to graze in uplands in the summer and in the lowlands in the winter. This is the standard Mediterranean transhumance, when unmarried men were sent off with the animals that were not needed at the village. Animals were also grazed in fallow fields, about half the total arable surface, and in the other fields between harvest and ploughing times for manuring and weed control. When the village did not own enough animals, the fallows could be rented out to type 2 nomads.

What is commonly assumed by the term "nomad" is type 2 nomadism: non-sedentary tribes specialized in raising animals, who relied for their needs for non-animal products on the exchange of wool, hides, cheese, meat, and transport facilities, as well as on raiding and protection money. This type of nomadism corresponds to an ethnic division of labour (Sussnitzki 1966). Type 2 nomadism is not attested before the ninth century

BCE. It became possible with the advent of the great empires of the first millennium BCE. Hence, biblical Hebrew has no term for nomad and modern Ivrit had to borrow it from European languages, while Arabic uses the term ʿ*arab* to designate Type 2 nomads.

Toponyms

Toponyms, the names given to places, are important markers of how humans construct the world in which they live. Place-names often transmit historically relevant information. In Semitic languages, most names are transparent (Zadok 1985; Halayqa 2008). For Arabic speakers, Muhammad is "the highly praised," while Petach Tiqwa is the "Gate of Hope" for Israelis. Most Arabic toponyms in Israel/Palestine have either a Canaanite or an Aramaic substrate that often transmits the ancient name of the site. Hence, Rabbat (Bene) Ammon is ʿ*Ammān*, Heshbon is *Ḥisbān*, Rabbat Moab is *er-Rabba,* and Bozra is *Buṣēra;* these names are all of Canaanite origin. Krak Mo'abā, "Fort of Moab," became Kerak and Rāmṯā, "Height," became Ramtha (biblical Ramot Gilead). These are Aramaic names, as the Irbid plateau was settled by Arameans from the eleventh century BCE. Aramaic words indicate that no previous Canaanite settlement existed, or that the place only became prominent in Persian times when the use of Aramaic was generalized. Canaanite names reveal settlement continuity, sometimes as far back as the third millennium BCE, particularly when they end in *-ān/-ōn*, like Gibeon (Isserlin 1956; Aḥituv 1984; Knauf 1988b). As expected, they are more frequent in the heart of the country than on the fringe areas that were settled later and often on a more intermittent basis. Names with *ba'al* elements are typical of new foundations of the Iron Age in the Central Range (Rosen 1988). Some names have been "translated" into Arabic. Hence, *Tell el-Qāḍī*, "Ruin of the Judge," has to be translated back to reveal the name Dan, "someone who is judging."

Despite a millennium of Hellenistic and Roman rule (333 BCE–694 CE), during which Greek and Latin names were given to the free cities (*poleis*) established next to Pre-Hellenistic settlements, the Pre-Hellenistic names reappeared. "Philadelphia" became Amman again, Antioch on Chrysorrhoas later reverted to Jerash, Scythopolis returned to Beisan (Beth-She'an), while Hippos was turned into Khirbet Sūsīye, "Horse Ruin." Hellenism was restricted to the upper classes; the majority of the population spoke Semitic languages like Aramaic and Arabic throughout the period.

Latin names that persist include Capitolias, a Roman foundation which survived in arabized Aramaic translation as Bēt Rās, "Summit House," and two different places called La(ǧ)ǧūn, from [*castra*] *legion(is)*, "legion camp": one close to Megiddo, the other east of Kerak. Both were places where legions were stationed. Only Nāblus, Sebastīye, and Qēsarīye remain close to their Greek origins, respectively Neapolis "New City," founded by Ves-

pasian in 72 CE to settle veterans; Sebastos, founded by Herod the Great on the ruins of Samaria in honour of Augustus; and Caesarea, another foundation of Herod the Great, also in honour of Augustus, this time on the basis of the name of his family.

Epochs and Conjonctures

The social appropriation of the past requires division into epochs. Hence, the Bible presents a succession: the time of the Patriarchs; the period in Egypt; the wandering in the wilderness; the periods of the Conquest, of the Judges, and of the Kings; followed by the Exile and the Return. This periodization presents two major obstacles.

First, these periods are a theological construct by the elites of Persian Jerusalem and Samaria for building a common identity (Edelman 2013). Using these periods to organize a history of Israel runs the risk of fostering the confusion between theology and history. Hence, the present history is articulated around the concept of biblical Israel. In this way, the epochs that structure the biblical narration of Israel's past correspond to the prehistory of biblical Israel. The chronological distance separating the events narrated in the Bible and the production of the biblical scenario is thus established. The formation of biblical Israel occurred when the stories it narrated belonged to the past and could thus serve as the basis of a common identity for people scattered to the four corners of the various empires that integrated the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The formation of biblical Israel began in the Neo-Babylonian era and continued through the Persian period until the early Hellenistic era. Biblical Israel then disintegrated into rival religious groups: Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims.

Second, periodization both constrains and enables history writing. Although it is hard today not to think of Israel's past in terms of distinct periods, periodization identifies particular events as turning points and *caesura* that were not experienced as such at the time. For instance, 333 BCE, the arrival of Alexander the Great in the Levant, was not as significant as modern histories suggest. Cities in Egypt and Asia Minor simply struck coins of Alexander in Persian attire, as they considered Alexander as the successor to their local Persian satrap. Alexander the Great can be considered the last of the Achaemenids as much as the founder of a great empire. Yet, it is a requirement of periodization that forces historians to lump together some events while exaggerating their difference from other events, so that the past can be organized in a way that meets contemporary social needs (Zerubavel 2003). In many cases, periodization is a literary artifice that does not reflect socio-political phenomena, which are characterized by continuity rather than by clear-cut periods.

To avoid the idiosyncrasy of historical periodization into distinct epochs, history might be organized into *centuries*, understood as social

categories that roughly correspond to 100-year periods. In recent European history, one refers to the "long" sixteenth century (1492–1618 CE), the "long" nineteenth century (1789–1914 CE) and the "short" twentieth century (1914–1989 CE) (Hobsbawm 1994). In the history of Israel, a "short" eighth century is encountered (796–734 BCE) and a "long" seventh century (734–609 BCE).

Given that Israel belongs to the fringes of the Mediterranean world, the micro-history of Israel can be synchronized with the macro-history of the Mediterranean systems through Braudel's economic *conjonctures*. The first half of the second millennium BCE saw the rise of the first Mediterranean economic system, limited to the eastern side of the Mediterranean with Egypt, Babylonia, Asia Minor, and Crete as the main actors. This network did not survive the Bronze Age. The second Mediterranean economic system began with the "Canaanite revival" of the eleventh century BCE and ended with the collapse of Mediterranean trade in the seventh century CE. In the **middle** of the eighth century BCE, Phoenician trade networks operated fom southern Spain to southern Arabia. In 671 BCE, Assyria subdued Egypt, making the eastern Mediterranean a monopolar world for the first time, realizing the old Egyptian and Mesopotamian concept of a world empire spanning the four corners of the world. The concept was taken over with much élan by the Neo-Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans, gradually shifting the centre of gravity westwards. When Egypt and Arabia became Roman provinces (in 30 BCE and 106 CE, respectively), the **domination** of Rome over the entire Mediterranean expanse was completed. In the process, Rome was deeply orientalized, and the Republic gave way to the oriental notion of empire.

In the fourth century CE, when the Mediterranean economy contracted again, Rome found itself sidelined, the centre of the Empire having shifted back to the eastern side of the Mediterranean world at Constantinople. The resulting vacuum in the West fostered the development of the fringes that primed the Germanic invasions. These invasions were the consequence, rather than the cause, of the Roman Empire's collapse. The third Mediterranean economic system is beyond the purview of the present volume.

The pre-history of biblical Israel unfolds during the first half of the second Mediterranean system in the framework of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Coote and Whitelam 1987). The integration of the kingdoms into the empires spurred the rise of a new identity to overcome the physical distance between the Diaspora and the Israelite cradle. As charter of the cultic centres of Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim, the Torah founded a new identity that made loyalty to any particular king irrelevant. A social memory based on biblical Israel rooted the new identity in Creation, and this fostered peaceful cohabitation with other groups in the Diaspora as much as in Palestine. Declaring the Others legitimate offspring of the

original couple and of the survivors of the Flood gave biblical Israelites a sense of common destiny, thanks to the Israelite patriarchs and matriarchs, as well as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam who brought them out of the house of slavery. The translation of the Torah into Greek in Egypt (the old house of slavery), along with the Hellenistic concept of history, prepared the way for the disintegration of biblical Israel. The constitution of a post-Torah history that narrated what happened after Israel's entry in Canaan until the days of Nehemiah caused a gradual rift with the Samaritans, who rejected the notion of history and insisted on the uniqueness of the Torah. The extension of the biblical canon by Jerusalem and its translation by Alexandria introduced Judaism into the thriving cultural scene of Hellenism and fostered the spread of Judaism far beyond its natural boundaries through the agency of Christianity and Islam (Pirenne 1939); after providing a sense of common identity, biblical Israel gave birth to three of the most successful monotheisms. Judaism eventually rejected Greek but split between Palestine and Mesopotamia, Christianity adopted Greek and tried to ignore the thriving Aramaic churches, while later Islam also splintered into central and peripheral groups. As children of the Torah, the Tanakh, the Mishnah, the New Testament, the Talmud, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the writings of Jewish and Muslim authorities are the continuation of a thought process that began millennia earlier in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant as a whole.
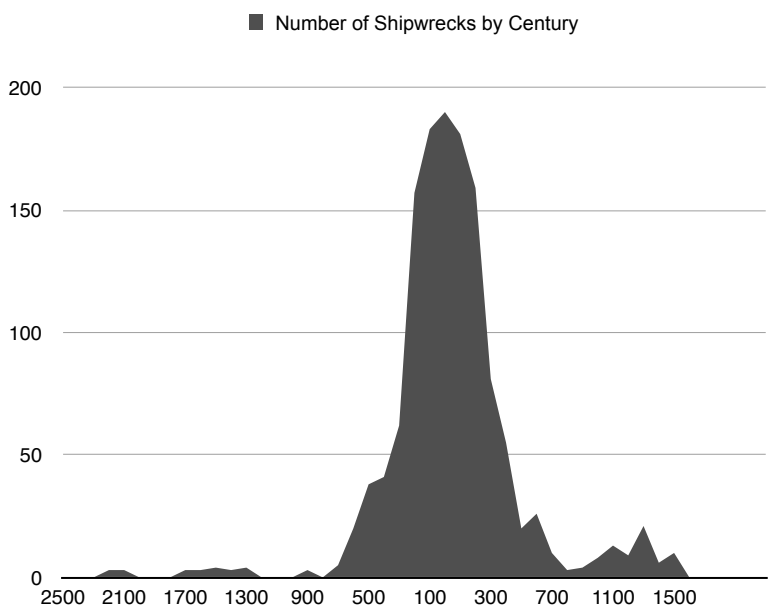

Figure 5:   Mediterranean shipwrecks (T. Guillaume).

    The rise and fall of the two older Mediterranean economic systems is reflected in the number of shipwrecks that litter the Mediterranean seabed (Parker 1992; Horden and Purcell 2000; Knauf 2008). As the climate and the nautical technologies experienced no major revolutions between 2000 BCE and 1500 CE, the loss ratio through shipwreck can be considered fairly constant for the period (Figure 5, shipwrecks). The Canaanite system of the Bronze Age (seventeenth to twelfth centuries BCE) is modest and limited to the eastern side of the Mediterranean. The number of wrecks for that period is too low to reconstruct an unequivocal "bell curve" as an indicator of the intensity of Mediterranean trade. The second system lasted three times as long (ninth century BCE to eighth century CE). The third system, only partially represented here, was stronger than the first one but much weaker than the second system. The Israel of the Bible appears on the scene after the collapse of the first system and at the beginning of the second system. Setting ancient Israel in its macro-historic context shows why there could be no kingdom in Israel and Judah before the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. The Neo-Babylonian interval, the so-called "exilic period," does not mark any change in the number of shipwrecks. From the seventh to the end of the fourth century BCE, Judah owed its existence to a favourable international *conjoncture.* The transition between the Persian and Macedonian powers is reflected in the recession of the fourth century BCE. It was followed by the booming third to first centuries BCE, bringing levels of prosperity that remained unmatched in Israel/Palestine until the nineteenth century CE. Rome arrived on the Levantine scene as the downturn set in.