Kings and Gods
Iron Age Secondary States and their Religious Dimensions

by

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What is an Iron Age Secondary State?

The Late Bronze Age (LBA) was a period of relative stability in the Ancient Near East (ANE). It came to an end when the large, ethnically homogenous kingdoms like the Egyptian New Kingdom (ca. 1350 BCE) and the Luwian (Hittite) Kingdom (ca. 1178 BCE) went into steep decline over a relatively brief period of time. Along with their larger, more influential neighbors, smaller kingdoms like that centered at Ugarit, also fell into disarray. What brought about this collapse is still largely unknown, and it was probably the result of a number of factors, including natural disasters and environmental changes.

For whatever reason, the period after the LBA saw a failure of centralized government, an overall decline of human population in the region, and the rise of rural pastoralism.[1] William Dever summarizes the impact of the collapse in the Levant.[2]

1. The already marginal economy became isolated.
2. Technology in use was not able to increase production.
3. Local conflicts, possibly with the ʿAbiru and the Sea Peoples disrupted civic life.
4. Larger polities were stretched beyond a critical state and became first overbearing and then absent.
5. The religious myths which provided unity alongside ruling powers faced challenges they could not meet.[3]

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[1] There is some reason to assume that environment was a key component of the migration of the people of Israel from Egypt into the Southern Levant. After migrating from Egypt, the Israelites would have encountered a harsh, colder climate. At around 1000 BCE, the Holocene glaciers were at their height, so the period was dry; but then there was a rapid warming, which would have led to an agricultural explosion and a subsequent population increase. See Arie S. Issar and Mattanyah Zohar, *Climate Change: Environment and History of the Near East,* 2nd ed. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2007), 163–93.

[2] William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites? And Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 176. Dever places the emergence of the Israelites in the LBA, with a continuity between that period through the Iron Age I transition. He provides a good summary of other attempts to place the Israelites in this transitional period as well, 129–51. The existence of Israel before the Omride period is not within the scope of this dissertation, but Dever offers a good discussion of the historicity of United Monarchy Israel elsewhere. See William G. Dever, "Histories and Non-Histories of Ancient Israel: The Question of the United Monarchy," in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 406 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 65–94. See also Yuval Gadot, "Continuity and Change in the Late Bronze to Iron Age Transition in Israel's Coastal Plain: A Long Term Perspective," in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. Alexander Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau, CHANE 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55–74; Yitzhak Meitlis, "A Re-analysis of the Archaeological Evidence for the Beginning of the Iron Age I," in Fantalkin and Yasur-Landau, *Bene Israel*, 105–12.

[3] When Dever uses the term "myth," he is describing something that is not necessarily factual in the fullest, modern sense, but is nonetheless grounded in history and formative for a society. In other words, he sees myth as primarily etiological. Elsewhere, he wrote, "A myth is simply a narrative, usually an ancient story, about the supernatural or larger-than-life legendary heroes. Myth is an attempt to provide a story—a worldview—capable of explaining *why* things are the way they are." In his view, myths are generally historical, but not necessarily factual in a modern sense. See William G. Dever, *Has Archaeology Buried the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020),

The absence of central powers inevitably resulted in a measure of chaos, something accurately depicted in the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, and 1 Samuel. Rebuilding a semblance of order required the emergence (or re-emergence) of social structures which were more local. Within the pastoralist society, single family compounds were the primary social unit. These were unfortified houses with outlying buildings. They were usually built on relatively high ground near a water source and served as a home base for semi-nomadic herders. In more prosperous areas, these compounds would have modest defenses and would encompass an expanded family structure.

Tribal chieftains, whose nominal claims to power extended over a larger area, might construct more strongly fortified hard points. These were compounds which did not necessarily support an agricultural population but were instead meant for defense of the population. During an attack, outlying families would come to the hard point, bringing their fodder and resources. The people would wait out the invaders, and then return to their homes to rebuild and replant.

Inevitably, these relatively informal, small-scale arrangements coalesced into into localized, petty kingdoms which were led by rulers (*mlk* in all NWS languages).[4] These petty kingdoms increased in local significance, but they were not strong enough to defend themselves against regional powers, and so as centralized governments began reasserting themselves, these kingdoms would align themselves with one or the other. For this reason, they are referred to as "secondary states," and they are a distinctive characteristic of the transition from Late Iron Age I to Iron Age IIA.[5]

<center>Characteristics of the Iron Age Secondary State</center>

A secondary state is difficult to define. They were clearly something larger than a local polity, but also not a state that could be classified as an empire or dominant kingdom. Alexander Joffe offered a definition of a secondary state by establishing certain functional attributes.

(1) A Centralized "Palace"
There must have been a central palace which functioned as a social-religious locus. Most of the population lived beyond the practical reach of the palace itself, but they still identified with the rulers at the central site. These were not "palaces" in the sense we usually employ the term.

22–25. See also William G. Dever, "The Patriarchs and Matriarchs of Ancient Israel: Myth or History?" in *One Hundred Years of American Archaeology in the Middle East: Proceedings of the American School of Oriental Research Centennial Celebration, Washington, DC, April 2000*, ed. Douglas R. Clark and Victor H. Matthews (Boston: ASOR, 2003), 39–56.

[4] Although *mlk* is used to describe rulers in the region throughout the biblical text, many of these "kings" were rulers of a single hard point. The larger, more national type of king only emerged in the Levant in Late Iron Age I, and the word's meaning shifted.

[5] The use of terms like "Iron Age" are increasingly problematic. The criteria for setting dates vary widely from author to author. The terms are used for relative and not absolute chronology. For a discussion of the age, consider Keith W. Whitelam, "Palestine During the Iron Age," in *The Biblical World*, ed. John Barton, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2002), 386–410.

There was little in the way of luxury goods and space for non-functional activity. They were organizational centers, handling trade and managing larger aspects of the secondary state. There was usually a residence for the king, but this was a functional residence. Jerusalem and Samaria are both examples of this kind of a palace. While this layer of Jerusalem's strata has long since been eradicated, the archaeological expeditions to Samaria have revealed what this kind of a capital might have looked like. Biblical references to the excesses sometimes found in both Samaria and Jerusalem hint at frustration with the way the palaces were converted for the person luxury of the rulers.

(2) An Administrative Elite

Administration was carried out by some type of ruling elite. The distinctions between the ruling elite and the populace were not usually well-defined. Sometimes it was ethnic or tribal, but it varied culture to culture.[6] This ruling elite was a landed aristocracy of sorts, generally autonomous, but under obligation to support the central king in ways including various taxation systems and military levies. Joffe addresses another distinction only implicitly. '

(3) Consolidation under External Threat

Generally, secondary states formed under a perceived threat from outside.[7] This kind of pressure is described in 1 Samuel, when the people asked Samuel for a king because of the power of the Levantine groups that had kings (1 Sam 8:4–9). The Philistines, Aramaeans, and raiders from the peripheral states would have driven rural pastoralists to choose one ruler to lead them into battle. Kings were primarily marshal figures, and we see an attempt at rudimentary kingship in Judges 9, when the people of Shechem made Gideon's son Abimelech king of their area. This first attempt at kingship fails miserably, probably because the region was under threat but lacked the other functional attributes of a kingdom.

(4) Interconnected Economy

One component Joffe does not include is the interconnectedness of the economies of a secondary state. Throughout the Levant, most of the secondary states' territory was agricultural or pastoral. Centralizing at least a portion of the output in urban areas opened the door for trade with neighboring states for goods.[8] This economic necessity was perhaps a benefit of the secondary state rather than a cause, but it nonetheless helped define such states.

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[6] Alexander Joffe, "The Rise of Secondary States in the Iron Age Levant," *JESHO* 45 (2002): 425–67. Joffe covers the distinctions of the LBA and Iron Age petty kingdoms in detail, but also believes the relationship between the two is not clearly delineated in the archaeological record. The retreat of large polities and the rise of secondary states did not necessarily alter affairs on the ground. In some areas, the same pottery and practices continued through the transition. In others, there are radical alterations in the material culture.

[7] Ibid., 434–42. Joffe notes, for example, that the Phoenicians took advantage of the situation to conduct an "involution," reasserting traits like autonomous city polities, and this in turn meant they were not unified against the threat of larger polities when they emerged. On the other hand, states like Aram and Israel which created defensive forces and attempted to secure their borders from incursions, as well as forming beneficial alliances to keep the ambitions of other states in check, were able to have a more sustained impact locally.

[8] Benjamin W. Porter, "Assembling the Iron Age Levant: The Archaeology of Communities, Polities, and Imperial Peripheries," *JAR* 24 (2016): 388–90.

Benefits of Secondary States

Baruch Halpern believes the transition from tribal structure to secondary states involved the synchronization of two factors.[9] The first factor was the added security discussed above. As the population recovered from the LBA collapse and urban centers began to emerge, their development was inevitable.[10] Larger populations meant that people were interacting with others, and tribal chiefdoms were not able to handle the larger scale conflicts that were occurring. Skirmishes over grazing land, cisterns and wells, and other resources would have required someone to handle the issues that previously might have been administered and adjudicated by the laws of a central power, even if it was distant.

This might explain the civil benefits, but these secondary states also developed a shared ethnic identity, some kind of social cohesion, which did not reflect a modern concept of static ethnicity.[11] To answer this development of cohesion, Halpern presents his second factor. He believes that the secondary states utilized religious fervor to unify the people. While Halpern looks to the Israelite example, secondary states formed throughout the region. Their religious profile is difficult to understand.

The Spanish historian Gregorio del Olmo Lete looks to the "palace cult" or royal religion as the focus of this religious fervor rather than the central mythological religions. This royal religion may have existed primarily on the non-literary level and therefore must be gleaned from oblique references in the mythological texts found at Aramaeo-Canaanite sites such as Ugarit.[12]

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[9] Baruch Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*, HSS 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 177, 182–84.

[10] See Bruce Routledge, "Learning to Love the King: Urbanism and the State in Iron Age Moab," in *Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete*, ed. Walter E. Aufrecht, Neil A. Mirau, and Steven W. Gauley, JSOTSup 244 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 130–44. This volume explores a number of factors that contributed to urbanism and the rise of secondary states. See also See Dever, "Archaeology, Urbanism, and the Rise of the Israelite State," 182–183. Also, Nicolae Roddy, "Landscape of Shadows: The Image of City in the Hebrew Bible," in *Cities through the Looking Glass: Essays on the History and Archaeology of Biblical Urbanism*, ed. Rami Arav (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 12–13. Dever stresses the lack of precision in terminology employed in the conversation. It is a matter that has not, as of yet, been satisfactorily resolved. There was a marked decrease of rural population centers in Iron Age I, and Dever estimates that up to 20% of the population of the Levant may have been concentrated in these cities. Urban sites have certain hallmarks. Faust argues a city can be loosely defined as a site with a high population density in comparison to a village (3–60 people per ha) and evidence of socioeconomic stratification. Additionally, the presence of urban walls is a common, but not ubiquitous, urban marker. Urban walls are defensive, in contrast to rural boundary walls, which Faust sees as serving a social purpose. See Avraham Faust, "The Bounded Landscape: Archaeology, Language, Texts, and the Israelite Perception of Space," *JMA* 30 (2017): 3–32. It is important to note that these are loose parameters, and the definition of an urban site is largely left to the excavator and/or commentator.

[11] Ibid., 391. Ethnicity was quite fluid in the ancient societies, since they were not rigidly defined.

[12] Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religions According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, trans. W.G.E. Watson, 2nd ed., AOAT 408 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 24–25.

These texts are superficially focused on the central mythology, but there is good reason to see the more practical royal religion behind the creation of the particular texts that are extant.[13]

A Working Definition of the Secondary State

In the context of the Iron Age IIA Levant, secondary states can be broadly described as those political entities which emerged between the collapse of large states at the end of LBA and the reemergence of large states which ultimately ended Iron Age IIA. They were semi-stable, transitional states formed around urban centers with relatively strong leaders who could establish a bureaucratic network of some kind, primarily through a ruling elite and some kind of religious unity.[14] Such states did not, however, have the apparatus, whatever that entailed, to evolve past the regional level and instead were subjugated once their powerful neighbors began to project power in the Iron Age IIA–B transition. They did not disappear, but rather became clients of these larger states.

The Key Secondary States of the Levant

Although they developed at different times and under somewhat varying stresses, the Levantine secondary states enter written history at the end of the ninth century BCE. Their constituent people groups existed long before their written records, but the appear in historical sources at the point when the emerge as secondary states. Most of these states endured in various iterations until the beginning of the sixth century BCE and the conquests of the Babylonians, but throughout their histories, they were under pressure by larger states. In particular, the expansion of the Neo-Assyrians in the eighth century BCE caused these petty kingdoms first to compete for primacy, and then to consolidate in a variety of alliances in opposition to each other and the Neo-Assyrians before ultimately capitulating and becoming client kingdoms. This was a dynamic situation, so the secondary state cultures were a flexible combination of indigenous, autochthonous cultures and behaviors or expectations imposed by the larger polities. All of this occurred in a relatively short time, and yet the events occupy almost the entirety of 1–2 Kings.

States as "Spheres of Influence"

Keep in mind that these states were not modern nations. They are better described as "spheres of influence." Outside of the ruling elites, people do not appear to have had strong city-state affinities beyond requirements imposed upon them such as taxes and military service. Primary affiliations were patronymic or toponymic, a reality that is present in both the biblical and extrabiblical records. The same pottery types appear in the same stratigraphic layers throughout the region, and while the number of sites varies from area to area, the contents of the

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[13] Of particular interest in this area is the work of Aaron Tugendhaft, who has mined the Ugaritic Baal Cycle for contemporary political significance.

[14] Although she deals with the much earlier urbanization of Sumer, Anne Porter has insight into this process, particularly the marriage of politics and religion in these societies. She sees economy, religion, and culture as three interconnected forces which may contribute more to the rise and fall of societies more than conquest or dominion. It is an interesting perspective. See Anne Porter, *Mobile Pastoralism and the Formation of Near Eastern Civilizations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 65–163.

site tend to be quite similar.[15] Of particular concern are the Judaean highlands, which lack any substantial sites with material culture that can be given an absolute date through radiocarbon dating.[16] There is evidence of both ethnic mingling and of groups that remained in isolation, such as the Shephelah between the Judahite highlands and the coastal plain. The Shephelah remained a Canaanite enclave until the beginning of Iron Age IIC.[17]

Secondary states seem to have had fluid political boundaries. People living in the outlying territories where two or more polities interacted on the ground were not clearly distinguished by one affinity or the other in everyday life.[18] The languages appear to have been mutually intelligible or easily acquired for the most part, and multilingualism appears to have been relatively common, although literacy may have been initially restricted.[19] The life ways of people did not vary greatly in the inland regions. This allowed for easy movement of people according to any number of necessities. There are numerous biblical accounts of this kind of movement, but the most important to the present survey is the Shunammite woman, whose quest to reclaim ancestral land plays a central part of the Elisha narrative (2 Kgs 8:1–6). These states should be thought of not as modern nations but rather as fluid spheres of influence and people movement which tended to have sort of gravitational wells of influence around their core city-state or networks of city-states. Understanding the basic distinctives of these secondary states has importance in Israelite study.

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[15] David Ilan, "The 'Conquest' of the Highlands in the Iron Age I," in *The Social Archaeology of the Levant from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Eric H. Cline, and Yorke M. Rowan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 283–84.

[16] Ibid., 288.

[17] Avraham Faust, "The Shephelah in the Iron Age: A New Look on the Settlement of Judah," *PEQ* 145, (2013): 204–6. Unfortunately, the region was almost completely destroyed by the Assyrians under Sennacherib and had not fully recovered when the Babylonians invaded a century later.

[18] The idea of clearly delineated political boundaries is a modern one. Until recently, most ancient societies were viewed as having a core and peripheries. Increasingly, there has been growing interest in the question of whether the common people in these "peripheral zones" had any real reliance upon central entities. See Annlee Elizabeth Dolan and Steven John Edwards, "Preference or Periphery? Cultural Interchange and Trade Routes Along the Boundaries of Late Iron Age Moab," *IEJ* 152 (2020): 53–72; Terence N. D'Altroy, "Empires Reconsidered: Current Archaeological Approaches," *Asian Archaeology* 1 (2018): 95–109; Craig W. Tyson, "Peripheral Elite as Imperial Collaborators," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 70 (2014): 481–509.

[19] Multilingualism can be identified primarily through the written records, not just monumental texts but also graffiti and casual texts. See Izak Cornelius, "Visible Multilingualism in Anatolia and the Levant (1st Millennium BCE)," in *Multilingualism in Ancient Contexts: Perspectives from Ancient Near East and Early Christian Contexts: Perspectives from Ancient Near Eastern and Early Christian Contexts*, ed. Louis C. Jonker, Angelika Berlejung, and Izak Cornelius (Stellenbosch, ZA: Sun Press, 2021), 57–74. On the topic of mutual intelligibility, Francis I. Anderson, "Language Bridges and Barriers in Ancient Israelite Society," *Ancient Society* 16.2 (1986): 72–78. Although this is an obscure article, Anderson applies common sense to connect the dots on mutual intelligibility and his thesis is worth consideration.

The Coastal Phoenician City-States

The first city-states to evolve into a secondary state were the Phoenician coastal sites.[20] Byblos was the earliest, but Sidon was probably the most economically powerful in the Late Iron Age I–IIA. The Phoenicians spoke a Canaanite language that was written with an alphabet possibly adapted from the Egyptian phonetic signs used to write out Semitic words.[21] The Phoenician writing system, which was one of an assortment of systems that emerged almost simultaneously in Iron Age I to replace the adaptations of hieroglyphic and cuneiform writing systems in the LBA, was put to good use in trade. Unlike their neighbors inland, the Phoenician city-states maintained minimal local presence. The Phoenician cities were ideally situated for inland peoples to bring goods, which could be traded for materials from the Mediterranean world. Their trade, alphabet, and eventually people spread across the Mediterranean basin, founding cities like Carthage and Utica around the time the secondary states were developing in the Levant. Sidon was the dominant polity in the region, a state of affairs that is evident in Greek and Levantine interactions with Phoenicia.[22]

The Hebrew Scriptures elevated Sidon as the firstborn of Canaan (Gen 10:15) and referenced the city's extensive merchant trade (Isa 23:2). Solomon's inclusion of Sidonian women into his harem, while a sign of his diplomatic inclusiveness, was also seen as a sign of his moral decay leading to idolatry (1 Kgs 11:1–8). They seem to have viewed Sidon's sister city Tyre more favorably, with that city's king Hiram helping with the construction of the Jerusalem temple (2 Sam 5; 1 Kgs 7:13–14, 9:11–12). By the time of Jeremiah, however, the two cities become linked as a single entity in the Hebrew mind (Jer 25:22). Writing in the first century CE, Flavius Josephus presents the two as more or less one entity. He claimed to have access to now lost local histories that detailed the dynastic change with the assassination of Phelles and usurpation of Ithobaal (אתנעל), the father of Ahab's wife Jezebel (*Ag. Ap.* 1.126). It seems likely that Ithobaal

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[20] There are a handful of recent histories of the Phoenician city-states. J. Brian Peckham, *Phoenicia: Episodes and Anecdotes from the Ancient Mediterranean* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Josette Elayi, *The History of Phoenicia*, trans. Andrew Plummer (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2018); Josephine Crawley Quinn and Nicholas C. Vella, eds. *The Punic Mediterranean: Identities and Identification from Phoenician Settlement to Roman Rule*, British School at Rome Studies (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Josephine Crawley Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2017); Carolina López-Ruiz, *Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021). These latter two focus on the development of Phoenician/Punic identity beyond the Levant but provide historical sketches of the Phoenician homeland.

[21] John Coleman Darnell, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Marilyn J. Lundberg, et al., "Two Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from the Wadi El-Ḥôl: New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt," *AASOR* 59 (2005): 63–124. While Egyptians had little interest in the affairs of the *ḥammu*, their word for the people of the Levant, the Canaanites borrowed extensively from the Egyptians. The Phoenician alphabet is the best known, although there were other writings systems being employed. Dominant languages with non-alphabetic writing systems tend to develop phonetic systems for writing foreign words. The best-known modern example is the Japanese *katakana,* which is used in concert with the native *hiragana* and *kanji*. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

[22] Elayi, *The History of Phoenicia*, 116–17.

ruled both Tyre and Sidon as a single kingdom, but like Omri, he was a usurper, which may account for their willingness to form a marriage alliance.[23]

<div align="center">The Aramaeans</div>

The largest Levantine state for most of Iron Age IIA was Aram-Damascus. The Aramaeans as a people group are hardly distinguishable from Canaanites until the emergence of a recognizably Aramaic language forms. Several inscriptions from the ninth and eighth century BCE show Aramaic as distinct enough from other NWS languages to have taken form during the LBA at least.[24] In Deuteronomy, Jacob is referred to as a nomadic Aramaean (ארמי אבד), a reiteration of his time in the region but also perhaps as a historical allusion to the Aramaean origins (Deut 26:5, Gen 28:6–9). There are those who believe Aramaean prehistory can be found in the stories of the *aḫlamû* who appear in a few LBA reports from Mesopotamia.[25] This is reinforced by known historical events, as the Aramaeans are described in Mesopotamian histories as regional invaders. The Aramaeans were considered somewhat wild, beyond the boundaries of civilized people. Their invasions in the early Iron Age put in motion the consolidations of power that would eventually yield both the Assyrian and Babylonian polities.[26]

Because of their decentralized nature, it is difficult to locate the Aramaean borders during the Iron Age. Younger chooses to define their location via "four major distinct geographic spheres" where other entities encountered them.[27] In the Levant, the Aramaeans did not behave as looters and raiders as they did elsewhere. Because the region was ungoverned by a large polity, they took control of significant city-states.[28] Aramaean power coalesced into several small autonomous city-states, the chief of which were Arpad (Aleppo), Ḥama, Damascus and Gozan. Damascus eventually became the dominant Aramaean kingdom in the region, and it was referred to simply as "Aram" (ארם) in Scripture. Aramaean sources use the toponym "Damascus" (Old

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[23] Elayi, *The History of Phoenicia*, 131–32.

[24] Holger Gzella, "New Light on Linguistic Diversity in Pre-Achaemenid Aramaic: Wandering Aramaeans or Language Spread?" in Berlejung, Maier, and Schüle, *Wandering Aramaeans,* 21–25.

[25] *CAD* 1:192–193.

[26] RINAP 1, Tiglath-Pileser III 37:16–21. For a thorough examination of the evidence, consult Alexander Johannes Edmonds, "A People without Borders? Tracing the Shifting Identity and Territorialities of the Ahlameans," in *Aramean Borders: Defining Aramaean Territories in the 10th–8th Centuries BCE.,* ed. Jan Dušek and Jana Mynářová, CHANE 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 26–62. A broader linguistic survey of the poorly understood transition into the Aramaeans is available in Hélène Sader, "History," in Niehr, *The Arameans in Ancient Syria*, 15–16.

[27] K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of their Polities*, ABS 13 (Williston, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 110. See also K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "The Late Bronze Age/Iron Age Transition and the Origins of the Arameans," in *Ugarit at Seventy-Five*: *Proceedings from the Symposium Ugarit at Seventy-Five Held at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, February 18–20, 2005,* ed. K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 131–74. Younger's idea of "geographic spheres" may be a better idiom for understanding these secondary states than the idea of borders, but as of yet, it has not been utilized in this way.

[28] Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans,* 191.

Aram. *dmšq*, EA 53:63, 107:28, 197:21).[29] Younger claims the Assyrians records used Damascus (*di-maš-qu*) sparingly, preferring *imērīsu* (Akk. "his donkeys"), or as they often did with subject states, a *bītu-X* formulation.[30] The biblical record explains Damascus's rise by a subjugation by David (2 Sam 8:5) and then a rebellion under Solomon (1 Kgs 11:23–25). There is little known archaeological evidence within the city of Damascus itself, since it remains a heavily populated city, but the Aramaean presence in the region is well-attested both archaeologically and textually.[31]

The Aramaeans first appear in the Assyrian records during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BCE), and they were a troubling threat for quite some time.[32] They may have consolidated into regional kingdoms, eventually dominated by Aram-Damascus, because of the emerging Assyrian threat. They were both allies and opponents of the Assyrians over the next three centuries. On the Kurkh monument, Aleppo appears as an Assyrian enemy, while Damascus and Ḥama appear as allies.[33] The kings of Samʾal, another Aramaean kingdom, left monumental evidence which includes appeals to the Assyrians for assistance at various times, just as Ahaz of Judah did (2 Kgs 16:5–9).[34] After Damascus fell to the Assyrians (ca. 800 BCE), the Aramaeans merged into the Assyrian identity. The Assyrians adopted Aramaic as their diplomatic language in the Levant. Millard believes that this was an intentional political move.[35]

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[29] Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans,* 549–50. The origin of the name "Damascus" is debated, as Younger points out. Albright's concise etymology is attractive but probably not complete. See William F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," *BASOR* 163 (1963): 47. See also HALOT, s.v. "דַּמֶּשֶׂק," 227. The Egyptians seem to have intentionally avoided learning the names of Levantine peoples. Younger references the possible Eg. transcription as *ti-ms-s-ḳ-w* or *ti-ms-ḳ-w.* The more common practice in Egypt, however, was to use general terms such as *ꜥꜣmw*, generally translated as "Asiatics." In hieratic legal documents from the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE refer to Arameans as *rmṯ ꜥ-mḥtj,* "northern men." See Gunter Vittmann, "Arameans in Egypt," in Berlejung, Schüle, and Maeir, *Wandering Aramaeans*, 233. For a more thorough survey of the interactions between Egypt and Aram, consider W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Syria and Egypt: From the Tell el Amarna Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[30] For this use of *imērīsu*, see *CAD* 8:5B, 115. A search of the ORACC digital format of RINAP shows twelve occurrences in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (for example, RINAP 1 Tiglath-Pileser III 27), ten for Sargon II, five for Ashurbanipal (RINAP Ashurbanipal 11, viii 120, ix 9; 22 i' 1"; 194 iii 59, iv 11), and one for Sennacherib (RINAP Sennacherib 17). RIMA lists two additional uses from Sennacherib (RIMA 3.0.102.009, 3.0.102.014).

[31] Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans*, 553–57.

[32] Allan R. Millard, "Assyrians, Aramaeans, and Aramaic," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded*, ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Allan Millard, VTSup 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 204–05.

[33] Aleppo's ruler is not named, but the site is listed as one of those conquered. Damascus (as *imērīsu*) and Ḥama appear in col. II, lines 90–91. See A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)*, RIMA 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 23.

[34] Millard, "Assyrians, Aramaeans, and Aramaic," 207; Bustenay Oded, "Ahaz's Appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III in the Context of the Assyrian Policy of Expansion," in *Studies in the Archaeology and History of Ancient Israel in Honour of M. Dothan*, ed. Michael Heltzer, Arthur Segal, and Daniel Kaufman (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 63–71. For a table of the participants and their polities, see Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans,* 456.

[35] Millard, "Assyrians, Aramaeans, and Aramaic," 206–8.

While they continued to set up monolingual Assyrian monuments in the west, for local propaganda, the Assyrians employed Aramaic in the Levant and other local languages elsewhere.[36] On the ground level, however, Aramaic became the workaday language of the entire region.[37] The legacy of these long-lived people and their short-lived kingdoms is mostly known linguistically.

The Israelite States of Israel and Judah

There is a wide diversity of views as to the time and method by which Israelite people moved into the Levant. What is firmly attested is that there were Israelite secondary states during Iron Age II.[38] The biblical record shows David creating a unified Israelite state around 1000 BCE which then splintered into a northern and southern kingdom around 920 BCE.[39] These two states

[36] There are Luwian and Phoenician inscriptions Azittawada (modern Karatepe in southern Turkey) and the Çineköy inscription of Urikki (modern Çine, also in Turkey), which also includes a cuneiform version. See Recai Tekoğlu and André Lemaire, "La Bilingue royale Louvito-Phénicienne de Çineköy," *CRAI* 144 (2000): 961–1006; André Lemaire, "West Semitic Epigraphy and the History of the Levant during the 12th –10th Centuries BCE," in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History*, ed. Gershon Galil, Ayelet Gilboa, Aren M. Maeir, and Dan'el Kahn, AOAT 392 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 291–308; Steven Kaufman, "The Phoenician Inscription of the Incirli Trilingual: A Tentative Reconstruction and Translation," *Maarav* 14.2 (2007): 7–26.

[37] Millard, "Assyrians, Aramaeans, and Aramaic," 210–12. The Assyrians themselves may not have acquired Aramaic and instead relied upon a class of Aramaic scribes to work alongside the Assyrian scribes, as detailed in the Nimrud Wine Lists: *LÚ A.BA KUR.aš+šur-a-a LÚ A.BA KUR.ara-ma-a-a*, "Assyrian scribe, Aramean scribe." (*MSL* 12:329 v 5–6). Martti Nissinen, "Outlook: Aramaeans Outside of Syria," in Niehr, *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*, 294.

[38] There was some kind of presence of people called "Israel" in the Levant at least from the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Merenptah. That Israel appears on the Merenptah Stela has been known for over a century. See J. W. Jack, "The Israel Stela of Merenptah," *Expository Times* 36 (1924): 40–44. In recent years, Michael G. Hasel and Anson Rainey have revived interest in the inscription. See Michael G. Hasel, "Israel in the Merenptah Stele," *BASOR* 296 (1994): 45–61; Anson F. Rainey, "Israel in Merenptah's Inscription and Reliefs," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 57–75. Rainey in particular casts Israel not as passive pastoralists or an agrarian underclass but as a genuine threat to Egyptian safety. Given that Merenptah reigned ca. 1213–1203 BCE, it seems that some entity known as Israel was in the Levant during the LBA. Little more can be ascertained by the evidence available, although Rainey does present some interesting ideas about what might have been the Israelite movement into the region. As the unified kingdom is not the focus of this dissertation, the topic will not be further explored. A more detailed examination of the northern kingdom, however, will be below, beginning on page 131, because that kingdom is central to this dissertation's arguments.

[39] This idea that David ruled a unified kingdom has been contested on several fronts. Wright in particular emphasizes the small, secondary nature of the early monarchy narratives in Samuel, and while he might overstate his case a bit, he is correct to see the kingdoms as regional, even parochial, at first. See Jacob L. Wright, *David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31–50; also, Alexander A. Fischer, *Von Hebron nach Jerusalem: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zur Erzählung von König David in II Sam 1–5*, BZAW 335 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). Israel Finkelstein has also argued against the existing of such a monarchy. See Israel Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the United Monarchy: An Alternative View," *Levant* 28 (1996): 177–87. For rebuttal, consider Amihai Mazar, "Archaeology and the Biblical Narrative: The Case of the United Monarchy," in *One God, One Cult, One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives*, BZAW 405, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz, Hermann Spieckerman, Björn Corzilius, and Tanja Pilger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 29–58. In

had a shared language and interacted in the same general spheres, but they also appear to have had fundamentally different approaches to kingship and interaction with other states. It is important to remember that these secondary states were not entities in the modern sense. Just as the Aramaean states were spheres of influence, so too the Israelite states comprised fluid territorial identities. This includes the unified state that existed under David.[40]

The northern kingdom of Israel was geographically the larger of the two states. Its territories included the Jezreel Valley, a key location in trade. A number of its prominent cities, particularly Samaria, Jezreel, and Megiddo, are well-attested in the archaeological record.[41] For this reason, some scholars such as Finkelstein have concluded that this northern kingdom was the first Israelite state, discounting the presence of a unified kingdom and suborning the southern kingdom to a client state. In a recent essay, however, Avraham Faust has argued that the archaeological record of this period shows not a gradual development of states, the scheme Finkelstein employs to elevate the northern kingdom to primacy, but sudden shifts and transitions because of crises. In such a situation, Finkelstein's focus on the northern kingdom might be misplaced.[42] Additionally, Masters has called into question Finkelstein's reliance upon excavated population centers as a means of determining relative population.[43]

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support of the presence of the southern kingdom, consider Lemaire's reading of "House of David" on Line 31 of the Mesha Stela. For Lemaire's rendering, see André Lemaire, "La dynastie Davidique (*byt dwd*) dans deux inscriptions ouest-sémitiques du IXe S. av. J.-C.," *Studi epigraphici e linguistici* 11 (1998): 17–19; André Lemaire, "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20, no. 3 (1998): 30–37. Lemaire's reading has been adopted almost universally but Finkelstein, among others, wishes to dismiss it as a misreading. See Israel Finkelstein, Nadav Naʿaman, and Thomas Römer, "Restoring Line 31 in the Mesha Stele: The 'House of David' or Biblical Balak," *Tel Aviv* 46 (2019): 3–11. While uncertain as to the extent of the Davidic kingdom, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman presents a sound case for the presence of a southern kingdom ruled by the House of David which answers all the objections of Finkelstein and others. See Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David: Political Formation and Literary Revision* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

[40] For another helpful discussion of scholarship on the misinterpretation of the Davidic kingdom in modern scholarship, consult Kyle H. Keimer, "Evaluating the 'Unified Monarchy' of Israel: Unity and Identity in Text and Archaeology," *JJA* 1 (2021): 68–101.

[41] Israel Finkelstein, "Stages in the Territorial Expansion of the Northern Kingdom," *VT* 61 (2011): 227–42; Hermann M. Niemann, "Royal Samaria—Capital or Residence? or: The Foundation of the City of Samaria by Sargon II" in *Ahab Agonistes*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe LHBOTS 421 (London: T & T Clark: 2007), 184–207; also David Ussishkin, "Samaria, Jezreel, and Megiddo: Royal Centres of Omri and Ahab" in same volume, 293–309. The evidence Finkelstein and Ussishkin present is valuable, despite their minimalist view of the Davidic kingdom. The view that the northern kingdom was larger and more influential in the ninth and early eighth centuries BCE is also held by those who do not minimalize the southern kingdom under the House of David, as evidenced by Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David*, 213–54.

[42] Avraham Faust, "The 'United Monarchy' on the Ground: The Disruptive Character of the Iron Age I-II Transition and the Nature of Political Transformations," *JJA* 1 (2021): 15–67. Faust argues well for the existence of a unified state and the coexistence of the two Israelite states.

[43] In essence, Finkelstein and others who share his views argue that certain traits indicate state development and higher population. First, population centers indicate urbanization and therefore denser population while the absence of such centers indicates a tribal state with a lower population. Second, increased literary output indicates states and therefore indicate a critical mass. For more on Finkelstein's view and reasonable objections to the view, see Daniel

The southern kingdom of Judah, which was ruled by the House of David for its entire history according to the biblical record, was probably not very influential until after the fall of northern kingdom in 722 BCE.[44] Fantalkin argues that the presence of aristocratic bench tombs are the first sure signs of state formation in the south.[45] The southern topography is almost entirely highlands and wilderness, with the exception of the Jordan River Valley to the east. As a result, the central palatial site, Jerusalem, is far from any major trade routes, and so the small kingdom was buffered from the events that affected the northern kingdom.[46] The southern kingdom was eventually overrun by the Babylonians and Jerusalem was leveled. During the Achaemenid Persian period, Jerusalem was restored, and the territory of the kingdom was remade into a province of the empire.

<div align="center">Peripheral States</div>

Other kingdoms like Ammon, Edom, and Moab formed on the periphery of the larger secondary states. Because their languages were mutually intelligible with the Phoenicians and Israelites, these kingdoms maintained close relationships with them.[47] The names themselves, however, were largely geographical and not initially political. For example, Moab has been referred to as an "un-state" because the kingdom is generally believed to have been largely pastoral, lacking a stable capital city until the 8th century BCE.[48] Moab did not have the

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M. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel," *JNES* 60 (2001): 117–31; John S. Holladay, Jr., "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA–B (ca. 1000–750 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, New Approaches in Anthropological Archaeology (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), 368–98.

[44] Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David*, 41–52.

[45] Alexander Fantalkin, "The Appearance of Rock-cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation," in Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau, *Bene Israel,* 17–44.

[46] Textual references to Jerusalem go back to Egypt's Middle Kingdom, as attested by the Amarna Letters. There the ruler of Jerusalem, ʿAbdi-Ḫeba, pleads with the pharaoh to protect the site from raiding forces (EA 289–290). His requests go unanswered because the Judaean highlands are just too far out of the way. The Amarna Letters are a rich resource for understanding the Bronze Age and preserve the Akkadian version of Jerusalem as *Ú-ru-sa-lim*, indicating a great antiquity for the name. Anson F. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Tablets from the Site of El-Amarna based on a Collation of all Extant Tablets*, HdO 110, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1120–24.

[47] Not only are the languages all NWS, but they also remained heavily influenced by Phoenician through their history. Much of their syntax and vocabulary is close enough that identifying which language an inscription is in is often quite difficult and sometimes relies solely on paleographic analysis. There are only a handful of known inscriptions in each. For an up-to-date summary of their close relationship, consider the previously cited source, John Huehnergard and Naʿana Pat-el, eds. *The Semitic Languages*, Routledge Language Family Series, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 509–51. Although dated, a thorough inventory of Ammonite inscriptions is available in Kent P. Jackson, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age*, HSS 27 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

[48] Bruce Routledge, "The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab," *JESHO* 43 (2000): 225–27. Routledge based his conclusions on the mainstream reading of the Mesha Stela as a commemoration of a contemporary king. If it is instead a "definable literature tradition of stories about kings of the past" as Thompson has proposed, then the Moab may have been so decentralized as to not be a state in any sense of the word. See Thomas L. Thompson, "Mesha and the Questions of Historicity," *SJOT* 21 (2007): 241–60.

diplomatic relationships that Israel had, but one of the most important Canaanite language texts is the Moabite Stone, on which Mesha memorializes his victory over Israel.[49]

For modern readers, the distinction between the larger secondary states and these peripheral states is one of extant records rather than what may have been true on the ground at the time. Were it not for the Moabite Stone, the kingdom would be all but invisible without the biblical record. These outlying kingdoms appear in the historical record from time to time, but it is difficult to envision them as geopolitical players on par with the larger secondary states.[50] Even under the Neo-Assyrians, they maintained relative autonomy.[51] Moab's contribution to the epigraphy of historical Israel, however, is significant and will be explored below.

<center>The Assyrian Threat</center>

For the most part, these secondary states operated independently and did not interfere too much with each other. They lacked the reach of the LBA states, but they were stable enough to sustain themselves as long as larger polities did not press into their territories. When the Neo-Assyrians began expanding out of northern Mesopotamia, they put pressure on the secondary states. Aram-Damascus was already integrated into the Assyrian sphere by 800 BCE, and the expansion into the southern and western Levant began in earnest with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (747–727 BCE) and Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE) and reach its apogee with Sargon II (722–706 BCE) and Sennacherib (706–681 BCE).

The presence of this Assyrian influence caused reactions. Beyond the obvious military and diplomatic responses, there was a drive in two directions. First, many of the kingdoms on the periphery of the empire responded by adopting Assyrian practices. The Assyrian polity radiated power, which made their culture attractive to these smaller kingdoms. Ahaz's adoption of an

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Thompson's protests may be overly exuberant, but there is good reason to treat Mesha's claims with some skepticism. See Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Ḥerem: A Window in Israel's Religious Experience*, BJS 211 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2020), 19–56; Douglas J. Green, *'I Undertook Great Works' : The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions*, FAT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 95–135.

[49] By the eighth century BCE Moab and Edom had enough of a presence to warrant entering into trade with both the Judeans and the Assyrians. See Juan Manuel Tebes, "Assyrians, Judaeans, Pastoral Groups, and the Trade Patterns in the Late Iron Age Negev," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 619–31. Philip D. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites: History and Theology in 2 Kings 3 and the Mesha Inscription," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 64 (1993): 1–14. Finkelstein and Naʿaman, on the other hand, take the Moabite Stone inscription at face value and see the Moabites as a threat in the ninth century BCE, claiming they seized much of the Transjordan and Galilee in the late ninth century BCE and held them until the mid-eighth century BCE. See Israel Finkelstein, "A Corpus of North Israelite Texts in the Days of Jeroboam II?" *HBAI* 6 (2017): 262–89; Nadav Naʿaman, "Historical and Literary Notes on the Excavations of Tel Jezreel," *Tel Aviv* 24 (1997): 122–28.

[50] For a summary of the appearances of two of the peripheral states, Moab and Edom, in the Assyrian record, see Wayne Horowitz, "Moab and Edom in the Sargon Geography," *IEJ* 43 (1993): 151–56.

[51] Faust has offered an excellent summary of their relationship to the Assyrians. See Avraham Faust, "The Southern Levant under the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Comparative Perspective," in *Imperial Peripheries in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, ed. Craig W. Tyson, and Virginia R. Herrmann (Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2018), 97–127. This volume is a strong summary of the archaeological evidence for the imperial periphery. The essays from Erin Darby and Stephanie Brown in the same volume are excellent resources as well.

Assyrian altar style is an example of this (2 Kgs 16:10–20). This is observed in the southern kingdom as the McKay-Cogan Hypothesis.[52] According to Cogan, "the foreign innovations reported of the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh are attributable to the voluntary adoption of Judah's ruling class of the prevailing Assyro-Aramaean culture."[53] On the other extreme, there was a reactionary revivalist impulse, a push to revive or reinstate the indigenous religious or cultural practices, as evidenced by the Hezekian and Josianic revivals. This latter impulse may have been behind the revival of Baal worship in Israel as well. It was part of the indigenous religious practices, and there is good reason to believe they were revived in response to Assyrian pressure. This area will be addressed in more depth in the next chapter, but it is important to note here.

The discussion of the geopolitical hegemony of Assyria may seem to be only a political concern, but there are a number of other implications. In the early twentieth century, it was generally accepted that Assyrian religion had infiltrated into or been imposed upon the southern kingdom after the fall of Samaria.[54] Through extensive examination of the reform movements in the Book of Kings, McKay became convinced that cultural and not religious influence was central to the reforms in the southern kingdom.[55] In particular, McKay notes the absence of any reference to Assyrian gods during the reforms. This is odd, given the inclusion of the destruction of other cult objects such as the bronze serpent (2 Kgs 18:4). As he puts it, "various deities worshipped in Judah during the period of Assyrian domination lack the definitive aspects of the Assyrian gods and generally exhibit the characteristics of popular Palestinian [by which he means Levantine] paganism."[56] Cogan agrees that the issue at hand was Canaanite practices rather than the Assyrian influence, but he sees a general decay of the moral fabric of Judah that moved in sync with the reintroduction of Canaanite religion.[57] Cogan sees a true religious reform in the ages of Hezekiah and Josiah, with "the spirit of repentance and soul searching" being a response to the experience of one crisis after another during the eighth century BCE.[58]

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[52] Mordechai Cogan, "Judah under Assyrian Hegemony: Reexamination of Imperialism and Religion," *JBL* 112 no. 3 (1993): 403–12. Also consider Nili Wazana, "Ahaz and the Alter from Damascus (2 Kings 16:10–16): Literary, Theological, and Historical-Political Considerations," in *In Search for Aram and Israel: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Omer Sergi, Manfred Oeming, and Izaak J. de Hulster, ORA 20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 379–400.

[53] Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Israel, and Judah in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.*, SBLMS 19 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 67. McKay's contribution can be found in John W. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians, 732–609 BC*, SBT 2/26 (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1973).

[54] Richard Lowry, *The Reforming Kings: Cult and Society in First Temple Judah*, JSOTSup 120 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 12–14. This idea was proposed by Theodore Oestreicher, *Das deteronomische Grundsetz*, BFCT 4/47 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1923). Lowry argues that Oestreicher's view was the majority position during the twentieth century but then was supplanted by works from McKay and Cogan.

[55] McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians*, 60–69.

[56] McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians*, 67.

[57] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 71.

[58] Ibid., 113.

Canaanite Kingship and Its Religious Dimensions

If, as Halpern has proposed, there was a significant religious aspect to the development of the secondary states and this religious aspect was tied to the royal cult as del Olmo Lete argues, then we must consider the kingship of these states to have been religious in nature. This is hardly unique in the ANE setting, but the Canaanite approach to the relationship of monarch to deity may have had a unique structure.

How Ancient Rulers Related to the Divine

This subject is often the focus in ANE studies. All ANE kings claimed divine mandate, but there were widely varied approaches to this mandate. In this section, we will consider three approaches.

Pharaoh: The Divine King

Egyptian pharaohs claimed to be the incarnation or vessel of Horus.[59] The king was not simply appointed or anointed to their kingship. He was predestined, and he became the god when he was crowned as pharaoh. For the general population, pharaoh was an unapproachable, unknowable ideal. He was only glimpsed from a distance during processions and ceremonies. It was acknowledged that different human beings inhabited the role of pharaoh, but they were meant to be a continuous procession of the divine.

Iššakku: Vicarious Rule

In contrast, Mesopotamian kings laid claim to divine appointment, reinforcing this through temple cult sanctions.[60] This was certainly the case among the Assyrians who viewed the world from a very top-down perspective. Aššur, the national deity, appointed the king as his divine representative. The king was not himself divine, but he was the regent (*iššakku*) and was regarded as the likeness (*tamšilu*) of the deity.

The king was seen as the servant of the gods, and as such, spoke with the gods' voice.[61] For example, Sennacherib was often depicted in positions reserved for the deities who served

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[59] For recent works on the divine kingship of the Egyptian pharaoh, see Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones, and Antonio J. Morales, eds., *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, PMIRC 6 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Lisa K. Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt: From the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Hill, Jones and Morales's volume follows in the footsteps of Henry Frankfort in this comparative work and has essays dealing specifically with the distinction between the Egyptian and Mesopotamian models. See also Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near East Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

[60] See Nicole Brisch, "Of Gods and Kings: Divine Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Religion Compass* 7.2 (2013): 37–46.

[61] Early Assyriology in the West overlayed the Victorian stereotype of the Muslim, Middle Eastern "religious tyrant" on the ancient context. For a full discussion of this and some suggested course corrections, see Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, CHANE 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 178–93.

Aššur.[62] In this environment, diviners and other practitioners of mantic arts would have served to legitimize the right to rule and divine will of the king.[63] A great deal of the material of this sacred kingship is preserved, and although the breadth of this understanding of kingship in the kingdom is not easily assessed, the ideology was nonetheless present.[64] The Assyrian template must have made an impression on the subsequent Mesopotamian powers, and it inevitably had influence upon the Levant, especially in the early and mid-eighth century BCE.

Melek: Divine Patronage

In the Levantine secondary states, kingship evolved along different lines. The kings claimed divine patronage rather than divine rule. A god chose a man through whatever agencies he used in that kingdom. Many kingdoms relied upon the right of combat, or the acclamation of the tribal elders. In Israel, the selection of a king required the participation of both the prophets and the elders of the people.

The Mesha Stela and Divine Patronage

Although not as well attested as the Israelites, the Moabites paralleled the Hebrews in Iron Age II.[65] Their affinity may be why the biblical text often emphasizes the connection, including the familial ties (Gen 19:37) and David's Moabite heritage (Ruth 4:17–21; 1 Sam 22:3–5). On the ninth century BCE Moabite Stone, Mesha claims the divine patronage of Kemosh in lines I.3–4: "I made this high place for Kemosh in Qerihoh, the high place of salvation, because he saved me from all the kings and made me enjoy the sight of my enemies."[66] Mesha claimed the patronage of Kemosh based on Kemosh siding with him in the battle against his rivals. In lines II.14–19, he claims that Kemosh personally commanded him to take Nebo from Israel, which

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[62] Tallay Ornan, "A Silent Message: Godlike Kings in Mesopotamian Art," in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 586–89. As an example, Ashurnasirpal II's Standard Inscription refers to himself as ŠID *aš-šur,* "Aššur's vice-regent" (RIAo, Ashurnasirpal II 002). The underlying term *iš-šak-ku*, has a complex usage, but shows delegated authority. See *CAD*, 262–66, particularly 2'd'.)

[63] Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison,* CHANE 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 72–85; Martti Nissinen, "Prophecy as Construct, Ancient and Modern" in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela,* 16–24. Stökl observes this practice among the Old Babylonian records. As shown by Nissinen, the Assyrians seem to have adopted and expanded this practice.

[64] For a study of this, consult Allison Thomason, "The Materiality of Assyrian Sacred Kingship," *Religion Compass* 10.6 (2016): 133–48.

[65] There are varying views on how closely the Hebrews and Moabites parallel each other. Consider Lauren A. S. Monroe, "Israelite, Moabite and Sabaean *War-ḥērem* Traditions and the Forging of National Identity: Reconsidering the Sabaean Text RES 3945 in Light of Biblical and Moabite Evidence," *VT* 57 (2007): 318–41; Collin Cornell, "What Happened to Kemosh?" *ZAW* 128, no. 2 (2016): 284–99; Brian R. Doak, *Ancient Israel's Neighbors*, Essentials of Biblical Studies 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 98–121.

[66] This is Burton McDonald's translation Lemaire's transcription: *wʾʿš.hbmt.zʾt.lkmš.bqrḥh bm[t.-] šʿky.hšʿny.mkl.hmkln.wky.hrʾny.bkl.šnʾy.* See Burton MacDonald, *A History of Ancient Moab from the Ninth to the First Centuries BCE*, ABS 26 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 113–14.

justified the slaughter of the inhabitants, including women and children. All told, Kemosh is mentioned twelve times on the stone, and each is a justification of Mesha's actions.

There is a great deal that is assumed about Kemosh because the deity appears prominently in the Mesha Stela, but the textual evidence for the Kemosh cult is scant. The title, at least, is found in the older Ebla archives (ca. 2400–2300 BCE), and McDonald conjectures that Kemosh may have been the deity of Carchemish, possibly an underworld god.[67] Sanctuaries at sites like Khirbat al-Mudayna ath-Thamad and Dhiban are often credited to Kemosh, but there is no inscription evidence proving the association.[68] Since the Moabites did not leave behind an extensive mythological text like the inhabitants of Ugarit did, much of what is known is based on biblical statements (Num 21:29; 1 Kgs 11:33; 2 Kgs 23:13; Jer 48:46). Still, there are a number of theophoric names derived from Kemosh (*kmš*) indicating that, at the very least, Kemosh was a popular deity even if not a national one on par with YHWH or Baal.[69]

Much of the bias toward national deities and national cults with central shrines comes from the reading of the Bible. The archaeological record, however, provides a much less clear-cut view of religion and the locations utilized for religious activity.[70] The Kemosh religion was flexible, but not as transportable as Yahwism. It was most closely associated with the ruling clan of the Moabites. Other forms of Kemosh, perhaps adapted to local custom and familial cults, existed throughout the region.[71] Interestingly, however, there are next to no other deities mentioned in Moabite inscriptions. There were certainly some central cultic districts in large cities, but as shall be seen here, there is good evidence for a religious cult surrounding the king and the royal constructs which were distinct from the temples. This does not say much given the scarcity of Moabite epigraphs, and the sample size may be too small to make a complete judgment.[72]

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[67] MacDonald, *A History of Ancient Moab*, 195–96.

[68] Ibid., 182–89.

[69] Ibid., 192–93. The various seals and bullae with theophoric names can be found in Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 509–80. A number of theophoric names are listed, in parallel with Hebrew and other NWS forms.

[70] Diederik J. H. Halbertsma, "Between Rocks and 'High Places': On Religious Architecture in the Iron Age Southern Levant," *Religions* 12 (2021): 740–66; Avraham Faust, "Israelite Temples: Where was Israelite Cult Practiced, and Why," *Religions* 10 (2019): 106–32. Most classifications of cultic sites rely upon Colin Renfrew's list of identifying traits. See Colin Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi* (London: British School at Athenes and Thames and Hudson, 1985). Faust does not directly contradict Renfrew, but he does argue that cultic usage was broader than modern quantifications.

[71] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 487–88.

[72] McDonald, *A History of Ancient Moab,* 198.

Judah, Israel and Divine Patronage

While the two Hebrew kingdoms spoke the same language and at least nominally claimed the same God, the two dynastic lines claimed different bases for ruling. Both appear to claim divine patronage, but they base the claims on different criteria.

The Southern Kingdom: The House of David

The more familiar Hebrew kingdom is the southern one, which was ruled by descendants of David from Jerusalem throughout its history. David was made king around 1000 BCE, and the dynasty then ruled uninterrupted until 586 BCE. This makes the House of David one of the longest-lived kingdoms of the period.[73] The claim to the throne was based *entirely* on the concept of divine patronage, and there are a wealth of parallels between David's claim of patronage and that of Mesha. David's final decoration reads almost like an Israelite version of the Mesha Stela (cf. 1 Chr 28:1–8).

The biblical text repeatedly asserts that YHWH placed David on the throne and gave him authority over the tribes of Israel. He claims authority through prophetic anointing (1 Sam 16:1–13), through proper respect of his predecessor Saul (1 Sam 24:8–22), through repeated victories over enemies both internal and external, and finally through the acclamation of the leaders of the tribes (2 Sam 5:1–5). This is confirmed through the reporting of an eternal covenant (2 Sam 23:1–7; 1 Kgs 3:6). This covenant was then reiterated in Solomon, and it plays a key part in the continued reign of the Davidic rulers throughout the Book of Kings.

Additionally, David was able to lay claim to a patriarchal prophecy that Judah would rule over the tribes (Gen 49:8–12) and a claim to the rich heartland of the Judahite highlands, which were the agriculture center of the Hebrew areas of the Levant. What is more, the House of David possessed Jerusalem, which had deep religious significance even in those days. As such, the House of David could fall back on an argument for divine patronage that went back to the very roots of Hebrew identity.

The Northern Kingdom: The House of Omri

The northern kingdom of Israel, particularly under the rule of the House of Omri, is one of the best attested secondary states in the Levant.[74] This is in addition to the narrative occupying a

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[73] The historicity of David was long debated until the discovery of the Tel Dan Stela in the mid-20th century. This includes a clear reference to the House of David as a ruling power to rival the House of Omri. Further discoveries have demonstrated the historicity of one of David's most important successors, Hezekiah. It seems undeniable that the rulers of the southern kingdom (and sometimes the northern kingdom) referred to themselves as being from the "House of David" or as "son of David." There was certainly some sort of legacy of an Iron Age ruler named David who unified at least part of the Israelite people and left enough of an impression that other styled themselves as his descendants. See Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David: Between Political Formation and Literary Revision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 41–52.

[74] Despite a bias toward his lower chronology which compresses Iron Age I significantly, Israel Finkelstein provides a good summary of the monumental and archaeological evidence of the northern kingdom under the Omrides. See Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, ANEM 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 83–118.

full third of the Book of Kings. According to the biblical record, the kingdom broke from the House of David over Rehoboam's refusal to offer relief to the twelve tribes. When the general Jeroboam returned from exile in Egypt, the majority of the Hebrew tribes abandoned Rehoboam and the House of David to follow him in forming a breakaway state (1 Kgs 12:16–24). For its entire existence, this northern kingdom was based on palace sites in the central highlands of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Jeroboam centered his kingdom in Shechem, which had previously been the center of Abimelech's brief reign as king (Judges 9:17). Additionally, he set up cult centers to rival Jerusalem in the south at Bethel and in the north at Dan.[75] According to the biblical record, this provoked YHWH's anger, leading to the violent death of Jeroboam's successor. The usurping king, Baasha, moved the capital was moved to Tirzah (1 Kgs 15:33–34). It remained there until yet another violent civil war broke out around 885 BCE. Baasha's son Elah was killed by a northern general named Zimri. In response, the Israelite armies in the south declared their commander, Omri, as king and they marched north to besiege Tirzah. Rather than be captured by Omri, Zimri burned Tirzah down with him and his family inside (1 Kgs 16:15–20).

Omri's Questionable Claim to the Throne
Despite receiving a fuller treatment in the biblical than previous claimants to the northern throne, Omri's succession is still somewhat veiled from our eyes in the biblical record (1 Kgs 16:16). Before becoming king, he was a commander of the armies (שׂר־צבא), and like Zimri, the usurper he overthrew, he is never ascribed a patronym or toponym.[76] This is odd, when his predecessor Baasha is said to be from Issachar, indicating that such information should have been available. His name (עמרי) does not appear to be Hebrew in origin. Stefan Timm prefers a Phoenician origin and argues that perhaps Omri lived in the region of Issachar and had mixed heritage (1 Chr 7:8).[77]

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[75] The purpose of these cult centers has been debated. Toews insists that they were not only devoted to YHWH but also not opposed by the prophets or Jehu. This is something of an argument from silence. The identification of the golden calves at both sites would indicate at least some syncretistic intent. See Wesley I. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel under Jeroboam I*, SBLMS 47 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 41–46.

[76] This martial title fits the extrabiblical evidence as well. Omri appears on the Mesha Stele as ʿmry.mlk.yšrʾl. For discussion of Omri's appearance on the stele, see André Lemaire, "The Mesha Stele and the Omri Dynasty," in Grabbe, *Ahab Agonistes,* 135–44. There are those who reject Lemaire's dating of the stele. See Thompson, "Mesha and Questions of Historicity," 241–60. If Thompson is correct, then the stele may not be an independent witness.

[77] HALOT, s.v. "עָמְרִי," 850. Gesenius extrapolated the name as עָמְרִיָה, "servant of YHWH," or "young learner of YHWH." GCHLOT s.v. "עָמְרִי," 641A. John Gray proposed עָמְרִיָהוּ, "the life YHWH has given." See John Gray, *I and II Kings*, OTL, 3rd ed. (Knoxville, TN: Westminster John Knox, 1971), 365. It seems more likely that the name is rooted in the Amorite ḫamru. Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch,* 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985), 318A. Hereafter designated as *AHw* followed by volume, page, and column designation, such as 3.318A. Stefan Timm, *Die Dynastie Omri: Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Israel im 9. Jarhundert vor Christus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982), 21–22. "Auch im kanaanäischen Sprachraum der Zeit, genauer: im phönikisch-punischen, fehlt bislang eine sicher vergleichbare Namensform." Additionally, Soggin suggested that Omri had the support of an army made up of mostly foreign mercenaries. See J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel from the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, AD 135*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 202.

Pekka Pitkänen has added to this that it was likely that the Hebrew-speakers were a minority, ruling over a Canaanite majority.[78] They could then have employed mercenary armies, of which Omri may have been a native commander. Like Uriah the Hittite and the Gittites who served David, he could have won his place in the armies, but not been a Hebrew by birth or religion. The legitimacy of his reign could have been questioned, given the warning against foreign kings in Deuteronomy 17:15.[79] His otherness would explain a great deal about his dependence upon Canaanite religion.

Consolidation of Royal Authority

To combat his questionable rise, Omri consolidated his rule in three ways. Two are explicit in the biblical record. The third is implicit and best seen in comparison to the text known as the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, which will be discussed below.

(1) After coming from Philistia and removing other claimants to the throne, his first act of consolidation of power in the north was the purchase of a previously unoccupied site in the Ephraimite highlands where he constructed his new capital of Samaria (1 Kgs 16:24). The Omride site was occupied for roughly one hundred and eighty years, approximately 900–720 BCE, and it shows heavy Phoenician/Canaanite influence, including ivory houses (Amos 3:16, 6:4) and significant cult worship of the Canaanite deities.[80] Omri and his successors constructed a number of other sites around the Jezreel Valley, including Jezreel and Megiddo, which point to this northern region as the focus of the kingdom. Overall, the Omrides embarked on ambitious building projects throughout the region to provide people with a sense of stability. All of these projects also indicate some level of affluence, perhaps from increased trade due to alliances with all the secondary states around them.[81] The new capital of Samaria represented a shift of focus as

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[78] Pekka Pitkänen, "Ancient Israel and Settler Colonialism," *Settler Colonial Studies* 4.1 (2014): 64–81; Pekka Pitkänen, "Ancient Israelite Population Economy: *Ger, Toshav, Nakhri* and *Karat* as Settler Colonial Categories," *JSOT* 42, no. 2 (2017): 139–53.

[79] The term employed in Deuteronomy is נכרי אשׁ, "foreign man." There is a sense of otherness, but primarily because the person is not tied to the Israelite land itself, and possibly to the covenant, by extension. The root is common in Semitic languages, generally with the same semantic range. Isaiah uses it in parallel with strangeness (זר), again with just the sense of not belonging (Isa 28:21). The sense seems to be more distant than the Canaanites (Deut 29:22). See TDOT 9:424; HALOT, s.v. "נָכְרִי," 700. Albright took it to be cognate with Akk. *nukra*, found at Mari, which he took to mean "exotic." See William F. Albright, "New Light on the History of Western Asia in the Second Millennium BC," *BASOR* 77 (1940): 31. This seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the word class. See CAD 11:328. Whether the Hebrew would apply this term to a non-Israelite but still NWS Semitic person is unclear, given that it is used to describe Moabites another Canaanites elsewhere (Ruth 2:10, 1 Kgs 11:1).

[80] For a brief overview, see William G. Dever, "Ahab and Archaeology: A Commentary on 1 Kings 16–22," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Post-Biblical Judaism: Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, vol. 1, ed. Chaim Cohen and Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 478–81. The most complete analysis is found in Ron E. Tappy, *Early Iron Age through the Ninth Century BCE*, vol. 1 of *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria*, HSS 44 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

[81] For an excellent survey and bibliography on this, see Tal Rusak, "The Clash of Cults on Mount Carmel: Do Archaeological Records and Historical Documents Support the Biblical Episode of Elijah and the Ba'al Priests?" *SJOT* 22 (2008): 36–39. See also Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 85–105. The Omride constructions were marked by (1) elevated podia, (2) casemate compounds, (3) a particular gate design in the walls, and (4) rock-cut moats.

Omri and his successors would increasingly have to deal with the threat of the Aramaeans and Assyrians to their north.[82] Finkelstein dubs this period of focus on northern expansion and regional contact the "Samaria polity," distinct from the earlier "Tirzah polity" which was focused on the Gibeon-Bethel plateau.[83]

(2) Omri's formed a marriage alliance with the Phoenicians through the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre. Omri's descendants, known as the House of Omri, ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel from 885/4 to 749/8 BCE.[84] Ahab succeeded Omri in 873 BCE, and during his reign, Israel became increasingly involved with the Aramaeans and Assyrians. Ahab's own son Jehoram ruled until 842 BCE, when the general Jehu killed Amaziah, Ahab's eventual successor, and established his own dynasty, known as the Jehuites or Nimshites, which lasted until 749 BCE.[85] When the last Nimshite king was killed by Shallum in 749 BCE, the kingdom began a twenty-eight year long period of instability which ended with the Assyrian conquest of Samaria (722 BCE). Baruchi-Unna has proposed that this second dynasty was a branch of the Omrides, with Jehu being a descendant of Omri.[86] If his theory is correct, then the combined Omride dynasty lasted for nearly a century and a half.

(3) Omri and his son Ahab were intentional in developing the worship of the Canaanite deities, chiefly Baal and Asherah, in their kingdom. Unlike their predecessors like Jeroboam who at least made an effort to revere YHWH as the Hebrew God, the Omrides devoted their kingdom's resources to Canaanite practices. According to the biblical record, Ahab constructed a "house of Baal" in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:33), his consort Jezebel sustained a cadre of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who are said to "eat at Jezebel's table," an allusion to a

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[82] Jeroboam's two sacred sites were in the extreme south (Bethel) and the extreme north (Dan). Greer argues that these cultic sites were tied to attempts to gain tribal allegiances for the northern polity. Once the Omrides took over, however, the focus shifted to the central capital and Jezreel. Greer concludes the sites were Yahwistic, at least originally. See Jonathan S. Greer, *Dinner at Dan: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sacred Feasts at Iron Age II Tel Dan and their Significance*, CHANE 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[83] Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 63–82.

[84] Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah*, 21–22. Galil's chronology is not perfect, but it does make sense of the often-confusing chronological data in the Book of Kings and so the dates from his work are generally utilized here. His chronology is reiterated in Appendices D and E. The details of Omri's relationship to the rest of the Hebrew population will be explored later in this chapter.

[85] The term "Nimshite" is derived from Jehu's father Nimshi and some literature employs it rather than Jehuite.

[86] Baruchi-Unna, "Jehuites, Ahabites, and Omrides," 3–21. Baruchi-Unna's thesis is that Jehu was a descendant of Omri. He bases his argument on Assyrian evidence and the use of "house of Ahab" in biblical condemnations rather than "house of Omri" (1 Kgs 21:22; 2 Kgs 9:7–9). In Assyrian records, Jehu is uniquely referred to as belonging to "son of Omri" while Ahab is "the Israelite" and other kings are referred to as "the Samarian." Naʿaman argues against this, supporting the consensus that there was no familial relationship. See Nadav Naʿaman, "Jehu Son of Omri: Legitimizing a Loyal Vassal by his Overlord," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 236–238; Tammi J. Schneider, "Did Jehu Kill His Own Family?" *BAR* 21.1 (1995): 26–33, 80; Tammi J. Schneider, "Rethinking Jehu," *Biblica* 77 (1996): 100–107. For text and reference to "Jehu of the House of Omri" (*ia-ú-a DUMU ḫu-um-ri-i am ḫur*), see Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of Early First Millennium BC,* 42–48.

centralized prophetic class associated with the royal family (1 Kgs 18:19).[87] The centralizing power of these religious actions can be seen in the succession of Jehu when he declares his devotion to Baal by declaring a celebratory feast (עצרה), complete with specialized garments (לבוש) and then executing the gathered prophets (2 Kgs 10:18–27). This is the only time in the Bible that this particular kind of assembly is associated with a deity other than YHWH (Lev 23:26; Num 29:35; Deut 16:8; 2 Chr 7:9; Neh 8:13; Joel 1:14, 2:15) although it is employed several times in a negative sense (Isa 1:13; Jer 9:2; Amos 5:2). One interesting omission in the text is a priesthood. Prophets are the emphasized functionaries of both the Omride royal cult and the opposing faction of YHWH worshipers. This may perhaps indicate Ahab's religious reforms were not the importing of a religion, but the reclamation of a Canaanite practice of royal religion.

The Royal Religion in Ugarit

The Ugaritic texts offer insight into the period from the mid-fourteenth century BCE until the city was sacked in the early twelfth century BCE.[88] While the religion of Ugarit predates the Omride dynasty by centuries, the texts may still reflect a broad Aramaeo-Canaanite sensibility.[89] Drawing upon the Ugaritic record, Noll describes the key elements of Canaanite religion as follows: (1) a broad, flexible pantheon of gods with a likewise flexible mythology, (2) divine patronage of the king, and (3) multiple levels of expression and experience, namely temple, palace, and household.[90]

Corresponding to Noll's three levels of experience, Gregorio del Olmo Lete discussed Canaanite religion as three interconnected spheres: (1) the cultic practices which can be observed in the archaeological and epigraphic record; (2) personal religion, for which we have very few

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[87] Timm and Niehr argued that the text we have today is ideologically corrupted and the text should read "House of Elohim" or "House of YHWH." See John A. Emerton, "The House of Baal in 1 Kings XVI 32," *VT* 47 (1997): 293–300. Finkelstein, on the other hand, points to the inscription at Kuntillit ʿAjrud to "YHWH of Samaria" as evidence of the YHWH cult in Samaria. See Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom,* 138–40; Nadav Naʾaman, "In Search of the Temples of YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman," *JANER* 17 (2017): 76–95. This evidence does not contradict the biblical record. The presence of this appellation hardly countermands the biblical evidence for a Baal cultic center since prophets of YHWH frequent Samaria in the biblical narrative. It may also be that the biblical prophets viewed the worship of YHWH in Samaria as false because of Canaanite influences. The Omrides may have referred to it as a house of YHWH while the Yahwist prophets saw it as a false house of Baal.

[88] The earliest Ugaritic treaties (RS 19.068, RS 16.145) give us a loose *terminus post quem* for the beginning of Ugaritic diplomatic engagement. The date of the collapse remains unknown, but it roughly coincides with the rise of the "Sea People" who raided the eastern Mediterranean during the Egyptian New Kingdom. For a general overview of Ugaritic history, see Itamar Singer, "The Society of Ugarit," in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. Wilfred G.E. Watson and Nicolas Wyatt*,* HdO 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 603–733; Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic*, LSAWS 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 10–14.

[89] This is not to say that all the people of the region had the same religious ideas, but rather that they had similar sensibilities or perspectives on the broader ideas of culture, which included religion. For example, Gibson feels that some of the religious texts at Ugarit intentionally add "local colouring" to their mythological texts. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends,* 7–8. What is known about Aramean views of the relationship of king and the divine realm seem to be analogous. See Herbert Niehr, "Religion," in *The Arameans in Ancient Syria*, ed. Herbert Niehr, HdO 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 137–38.

[90] Kurt L. Noll, "Canaanite Religion," *Religion Compass* 1.1 (2007): 63.

records; and (3) the mythology which includes the long form myths and epics which most people equate with the Canaanite religion.[91] Although the mythological level certainly has relevance in any discussion of Canaanite religion, Olmo Lete argues that the mythology was the domain of the priesthood and not accessible to the general public. There was a certain decentralized pragmatism built into the multi-tiered Canaanite religion. The more common cultic sites were relatively small in scale and generally devoted to lower deities.[92] Chief among the sites in the northern kingdom are Dan, Bethel, Lachish, Megiddo, and Hazor. Some, such as the "high places" (במת) embedded in the gates of Dan, were deeply integrated into the architecture of the Iron Age city and appear to have been unique to Iron Age II.[93] Others, like the Great Temple at Megiddo, date to the EBA and were constantly being rebuilt, enlarged, and revived.[94] Far from being monolithic, Canaanite religion varied from location to location, and different deities had different levels of influence depending upon the state wielding the most power at the moment.

According to Olmo Lete there is a sense in which a unique group of deities who guard "the house," were integrated with whoever was the ruling house in a particular location (KTU 1.112; 1.105; 1.106; 1.43; 1.115; 1.139).[95] These deities may be referred to as "king's gods" (RS. 15.14:5–7), and they appear not to have been a part of the local pantheon.[96] They could, at his

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[91] Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religions*, 1.

[92] Coogan offers four "fluid" criteria for defining a cultic site or space (temple or otherwise): (1) isolation from secular sites; (2) the presence of exotic or specialized materials such as miniaturized vessels, figurines, and rare or expensive objects; (3) continuity of buildings over multiple time periods, and (4) parallels of architectural features with other known cultic sites. For further delineation, see Michael David Coogan, "On Cults and Cultures: Reflections on the Interpretation of Archaeological Evidence," PEQ 119 (1987): 1–8; Michael David Coogan, "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the religion of Ancient Israel," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. Dean. McBride (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 115–24. Steiner notes, however, that such a definition applied to the Southern Levant "is often uncertain and per force based on insufficient data." See Margreet L. Steiner, "Iron Age Cultic Sites in Transjordan," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 145–58. There are eight Iron Age sites known from the Transjordan: three in Ammon, four in Moab, and one in Edom. See also Craig W. Tyson, "The Religion of the Ammonites: A Specimen of Levantine Religion from the Iron Age II (ca. 1000–500 BCE)," *Religions* 10.3 (2019): doi:10.3390/rel10030153. Gilmour speaks of the cultic nature of a site on a spectrum, which is a useful tool here. See Garth Gilmour, "The Archaeology of Cult in the Ancient Near East: Methodology and Practice," *Old Testament Essays* 13.3 (2000): 283–92. There is a possibility that there were numerous small sites now lost, such as the unusual structure published by Clark and Herr at Tall al-ʿUmayri, Jordan, in 2006. See Larry G. Herr, "An Early Iron Age I House with a Cultic Corner at Tall al-ʿUmayri, Jordan," in Gitin, Wright, and Dessel, *Confronting the Past*, 61–74.

[93] Avraham Biran, "The High Places of Biblical Dan," in *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan: With the Assistance of Ginny Matthias*, ed. Amihai Mazar, JSOTSup 331 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 148–55.

[94] Matthew J. Adams, Israel Finkelstein, and David Ussishkin, "The Great Temple of Early Bronze I Megiddo," *AJA* 118.2 (2014): 285–305.

[95] Variously rendered as *bʿlt bhtm, ilt bt, il bt,* and perhaps *bbt/btbt*. See Gregorio del Olmo Lete, "Royal Aspects of the Ugaritic Cult," in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of April 1991*, ed. J. Quaegebeur, OLA 55 (Leuven: Uitgevergij Peeters en Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1993), 51.

[96] Ibid., 52–53.

death, usher a king into the divine council.[97] This sense of a royal pantheon distinct from both the mythical and the personal may give us insight into the impetus behind Omri's relationship with the powerful Phoenicians, themselves Canaanites.

Even the broad mythological Baal Cycle, which stands apart from the numerous religious texts found at Ugarit, may contain references to this kind of royal pantheon and its role in the royal cult.[98] There are six tablets (KTU 1.1–1.6) that are universally accepted to be part of the cycle, although their order is still debated.[99] It has similarities to Babylonian mythology, known from *Enuma Eliš*. The presence of variant versions (KTU 1.101 and 1.133 are examples) indicates a popularity of the stories. It is generally labeled a "cycle" because there is an ongoing discussion whether the tablets form a continuous narrative.[100] Pardee points out that the Baal Cycle consists largely of formal letters written back and forth between the parties involved.[101] Extraordinarily, even the name of the author/scribe of the extant tablets, ʾIlîmilku, is known from the text because he signed several of them.[102] Although ʾIlîmilku's version of the Baal Cycle dates from the late twelfth century BCE, the oral tradition predates the tablets. To date, there is not a consensus on the origins and composition date, or how much ʾIlîmilku altered pre-existing traditions to produce his version.[103]

The Ugaritic Baal Cycle and The Omride Royal Cult

Frank Moore Cross established the widely accepted view that the Ugaritic Baal Cycle was written for "the establishment of kingship among the gods."[104] Aaron Tugendhaft has challenged this view, arguing that the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (hereafter UBC) was composed as a justification for Niqmaddu III's (ca. 1225/20–1215 BCE) ascent to the throne in Ugarit.[105] While El remains

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[97] Olmo Lete, "Royal Aspects of the Ugaritic Cult," 57–58.

[98] A comprehensive discussion of the Ugaritic religious texts can be found in Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*.

[99] Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*, vol. 1, VTSup 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 2–3. A number of other tablets include portions of the cycle (KTU 1.7–1.12, 1.133) and others (KTU 1.101) are conjectured to belong to the cycle.

[100] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 7.

[101] Dennis Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of West-Semitic Literary Composition*, Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 2007 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)*,* 52.

[102] In his self-referential colophons ʾIlîmilku offers insight into his role as a scribe (*spr*), an official (*ta ʿʿāyu*) of Niqmaddu the king of Ugarit, and disciple (*lmd*) of ʾAttēnu the diviner priest. Additionally, he claims to offer his textual version of the Baal Cycle as an original work (RS 92.2016). See Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of West-Semitic Literary Composition*, 42–50.

[103] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 29–36.

[104] Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 78–80.

[105] The wider consensus is that the tablets date from the reign of Niqmaddu II (ca. 1350–1315 BCE). See Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 1. Tugendhaft prefers the later Niqmaddu III. "More definitive, however, is the

king of the gods throughout, Baal ascends within the world order, demonstrating that in present day life, the royal conflict is being fought through proxies. There is an inherent parallel between the divine ascent and the ascent of the earthly king.[106] This is not an idea original with Tugendhaft. There is precedent in several of Martin Smith's previous considerations.[107] Smith argues that a less-known, shorter Baal text from Mari (Mari A. 1968) gives us a glimpse into a "divine replacement" or the shift of divine favor to a new kingdom.[108]

Tugendhaft sees the UBC as a "reflection on the foundational claims of Late Bronze Age political institutions by calling into question the hierarchical principle that justifies them."[109] The language of the Baal Cycle echoes LBA treaties, and then upsets the expected balance. For example, he cites Greenfield's examination of Baal's declaration of vassalage to Mot, which closely follows the language in an Ugaritic treaty with Hatti.[110] Recent scholarships has begun to focus on kinship relationships in the UBC and how the "young king" ascends within the royal household.[111] Tugendhaft sees this not as a matter of local succession but of international relationships. "The poem originally aimed to inspire critical reflection on the political institutions of its day and the myths that circulated to maintain them."[112] In other words, the ascendancy of Baal over the other gods mirrors Niqmaddu III's rejection of the order of affairs that had existed before and his claim to unique sovereignty over his people.[113] Tugendhaft predicates his understanding of the UBC based on several observations.

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simple fact that the cuneiform alphabet used to inscribe the poem had likely not yet been invented during the fourteenth-century reign of Niqmaddu II." Aaron Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, The Ancient Word (London: Routledge, 2018), 30.

[106] Aaron Tugendhaft, "Unsettling Sovereignty: Politics and Poetics in the Baal Cycle," *JOAS* 132 (2012): 368; Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, 71.

[107] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. 1, xxii–xxiv; Mark S. Smith, "Interpreting the Baal Cycle," *UF* 18 (1986): 313–39.

[108] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 87–96. Mari A. 1968 was published in Jean-Marie Durand, "Le mythologeme du combat entre le dieu de l'orage et la mer en Mésopotomai," *Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires* 7 (1993): 41–61.

[109] Tugendhaft, "Politics and Poetics," 369.

[110] Jonas C. Greenfield, "Some Aspects of Treaty Terminology in the Bible," in *'Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology*, vol. 2, ed. Shalom M. Paul, Michael E. Stone, and Avital Pinnick (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 901–6; F. Charles Fensham, "Notes on Treaty Terminology in Ugaritic Epics," *UF* 11 (1979): 265–74.

[111] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 2, 17.

[112] Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, 18.

[113] Tugendhaft, "Politics and Poetics," 374. It is of note that Mark Smith sees a correlation between the language Baal employs in throwing off suzerainty to the other gods and Ahab's rejection of Ben-Hadad's assertion of authority over Israel in 1 Kings 20:1–4. See Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 294.

1. The Use of Vernacular Ugaritic

Given that Akkadian was the language of literature and diplomacy at the time, this is a significant change.[114] This localization of the text is a political move, shifting the focus of the mythology away from the Mesopotamian context to the periphery, making Ugarit the center of the narrative's setting. Since Cross, it has been accepted that the UBC parallels the Babylonian *Enuma Eliš* and functions primarily as a cosmogony.[115]

2. The Use of LBA Treaty Language.

This point has been observed by Smith as well.[116] Tugendhaft sees the poem as "taking advantage of local religion" and using the narrative of the gods to comment on earthly international interactions.[117] The poet ʾIlîmilku is able to craft a world in which his sovereign Niqmaddu is elevated along with Baal to a position not only of local sovereignty but of international acclaim.

3. Reinterpretation of Common Motifs

In the UBC, Baal is in conflict with Yamm and Mot, while in the *Enuma Eliš*, Marduk fights with Tiamat. Beside this broad similarity, the two epics do not cover the same materials, as Baal does not then establish the physical world from the remains of Yamm. While the UBC might borrow the motif, there is something else going on, and both Tugendhaft and Smith believe that it somehow connected to the political activities of the present world.[118] Subtle distinctions make it clear that the UBC is striving for a familiarity of broad ideas, but practical applications. For example, Yamm is not the primordial waters in the Ugaritic mythology. For the Babylonians, Tiamat was vanquished and gone. Yamm, on the other hand, was still considered active in the

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[114] Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 54–57; Robert Hawley, Pardee, and Roche-Hawley, "The Scribal Culture of Ugarit," 260.

[115] Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 78.

[116] See, for example, Smith's comparison of KTU 1.2.36–38: (36) *[ ]°.ṯr.ʾabh.ʾabh.ʾil[.] ʾbdk.b ʿl. yymm. ʾbdk.b ʿl* (37) *[nhr]m.bn.dgn.ʾa[s]rkm.hw.ybl.ʾargmnk.kʾilm* (38) *[ ]ybl.wbn.gdš.mnḥyk ʾap.ʾanš.zbl.b ʿ[l]* ("[and] bull El his father [answers]: "Your slave is Baal, O Yamm, Your slave is Baal, [O River], The son of Dagan your captive. He will bring tribute to you, Like the gods, [a gift to you] he will bring, like the Holy Ones, offerings to you) with KTU 3.1.24–26, *ʾargmn nqmd mlk ʾugrt dybl lšpš mlk rb b ʿlh* ("the tribute of Niqmaddu king of Ugarit which will be brought to the Sun, the Great King, his lord"). Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 260, 266, 308.

[117] Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, 38.

[118] Ibid., 64; Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, xxv–xxvi. See also Noga Ayali-Darshan, "'The Bride of the Sea': The Traditions of Astarte and Yamm in the Ancient Near East," in *A Woman of Valor: Jerusalem Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Joan Goodnik Westenholz*, ed. Wayne Horowitz, Uri Gabbay, and Filip Vukosavović (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 2010), 19–33.

world.[119] The intention then is to present not a foundational struggle against chaos, but a present battle, which Baal has won against an enemy still active in the world.

4. Divine Dynamics Reflect a Present Authority Crisis

Tugendhaft asks why, if Yamm is defeated and killed in the first part of the UBC, does Yamm send an envoy to El in the second part? For Tugendhaft, the answer is that the battle with Yamm represents an ongoing conflict.[120] In the exchange, he draws on Smith's comparison with the way Ben-hadad sends messengers to the Omride king Ahab (1 Kgs 20:1–4).[121] According to Tugendhaft the similarity is because of the way a king might be forced to submit to another king. He argues that this type of humiliating negotiation is a contrast with the ascendance of Baal. "If Baal eventually acquires the right to rule, it is not because his kingship is a constituent element of an ordered universe. By implication, neither the kingship of Baal's human devotee (the king of Ugarit) nor the suzerainty of that king's overlord (the king of Hatti) enjoys cosmic grounding."[122] In other words, the king of Ugarit claims the right to rule because he has succeeded to rule. His patron deity ascends of his own volition, and so does the king of Ugarit.

Summary

Although the Ugaritic kingdom was LBA and fell hundreds of years before the rise of the Hebrew secondary states, it provides an intriguing glimpse into the way an Aramaeo-Canaanite kingdom would lay claim to divine sanction as a key component of the assertion of rule for a particular dynasty. The religio-political undercurrent found in the UBC is indicative of what might have been a template for stability in the region. Mesha seems to have employed a similar religio-political approach in stabilizing his kingdom, which was contemporary with the Omrides. Although evidence on the ground is admittedly thin, given how little remains from the other secondary states in the southern Levant, these clues open the door to a possible interpretation of Omri and Ahab's decision to align themselves with a Canaanite religious identity rather than the Yahwistic identity that their predecessors had employed. Let us now turn our attention to the dynamics of secondary state formation that might have precipitated such an alignment.

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[119] Wayne T. Pitard, "The Combat Myth as a Succession Story at Ugarit," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 201. This is corroborated by the god lists from Ugarit, which list Yamm is listed in such a way that he is one of the present deities rather than one of Cross's "olden gods." Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 78.

[120] Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, 87.

[121] Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle,* vol. 1, 294.

[122] Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry*, 95.

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