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Emanuel Pfoh ^a

^a University of Buenos Aires - IMHICIHU-CONICET, Buenos Aires, Argentina C1083ACA

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Dealing with Tribes and States in Ancient Palestine

A Critique on the Use of State Formation Theories in the Archaeology of Israel

Emanuel Pfoh

University of Buenos Aires – IMHICIHU-CONICET, Saavedra 15 – 5to piso, Buenos Aires, Argentina C1083ACA
epfoh@yahoo.com.ar

ABSTRACT: This paper offers a critique on state formation theories used in the explanation of the rise of the biblical United Monarchy. The last three decades of archaeological and biblical research have shown that there is no firm evidence for speaking of a kingdom or empire of David and Solomon in ancient Palestine. Thus what is proposed here is to evaluate the archaeological record through the data provided by the ethnological record of the Middle East, keeping the biblical stories apart from this interpretation. The analysis of the dynamics and structure of Middle Eastern “tribal states” and “chiefdom societies”, including here the practice of patronage bonds, gives us important keys for understanding Palestine’s societies. The historical perspective that appears then is one different from the Bible’s stories and from modern ideas such as “states” and “nations”, offering us instead a better methodology for reconstructing ancient Palestine’s historical past.

Introduction

The thorny question of the emergence of statehood in ancient Palestine was until not so long ago a secondary issue regarding the general assent in biblical, archaeological and historical studies about the real, historical existence of an Israelite state—the so-called United Monarchy of the 10th century BCE, subsequently divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern one of Judah—in the highlands of Palestine, ruling at times over the contemporary states of Ammon, Moab and Edom in Transjordan, the Philistine Pentapolis in the southern Levant coast and the Aramaean tribal states in the

Syrian desert.¹ Certainly, nowadays we can no longer talk about that general assent. As Gary N. Knoppers put it ten years ago, “the united monarchy no longer unites modern scholars”.² Indeed, the fierce debate initiated early in the 90’s—but dating back to the 70’s actually³—on the historicity of the past realities portrayed in biblical literature and the question of the literary nature of the Old Testament has not only cast doubt on the range of the empire of David and Solomon but already if such an empire or kingdom along with these kings existed at all. Nevertheless, this uneasy “crisis” in biblical studies in the eyes of conservative scholarship has brought forward precious opportunities for posing new questions in the field that help us to understand the mindset behind the biblical images and their meaning and also offering new perspectives for reconstructing a secular, non-biblically based history of Israel in antiquity⁴. This last situation is my special interest here since the question of the socio-political character of the Israelite and Judean states provide us with all the requisites for thinking anew this particular chapter in the history of ancient Palestine.

The rise of new entities during Iron Age II (*ca.* 1000-600 BCE), usually referred to as “states” or “nations” but too vaguely understood in its socio-political structure and dynamics,⁵ has always been taken as a part of the history of Palestine in antiquity. However, the understanding of these new entities follows closely the biblical portrait of the period, that is, Israel and Judah *were states* and both constituted a real nation during the Iron Age because the account in, i.e., 1-2 Kings tells us so. But does this make any sense if we put the biblical narrative aside and focus our attention just on the archaeological record and the ethnographic and anthropological data?

1. The emergence of statehood in Israel is textually verified *only* by the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel 8-31; 2 Samuel 1-24; and 1 Kings 1-11; and then in 1 Chronicles 10-29; and 2 Chronicles 1-9.

2. G.N. Knoppers, “The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel”, *JBL* 116 (1997), pp. 19-44 (p. 19).

3. See a résumé—now somewhat dated—in L.L. Grabbe, “Writing Israel’s History at the End of the Twentieth Century”, in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds.), *IOSOT Congress Volume – Oslo 1998 (VTS, 80; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000)*, pp. 203-218.

4. This is the importance of studies like the ones of G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1988 [1986]); N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites (JSOT SS, 110; Sheffield: SAP, 1991)*; idem, *The Israelites in History and Tradition (LAI; Louisville, KY: WJK, 1998)*; P.R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”, (JSOT SS, 148; Sheffield: SAP, 1992)*; Th.L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources (SHANE, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992)*; idem, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999) = *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), among many others. Cf. also the important article of N. Wyatt, “The Mythic Mind”, *SJOT* 15 (2001), pp. 3-56.

5. Cf. L.G. Herr, “The Iron Age II Period: Emerging Nations”, *BA* 60/3 (1997), pp. 114-183. A more thorough description is presented in A.H. Joffe, “The Rise of Secondary States in the Iron Age Levant”, *JESHO* 45 (2002), pp. 425-467.

At least since the publication of Keith W. Whitelam's important contribution, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*⁶, we must acknowledge that in socio-political terms "ancient Israel" is not a Nation-State but an image created in modern times by scholars taking as a model the European 19th century's Nation-States. Thus, if we had a state, we would also have a nation. If we had David's and Solomon's empire, we would also have an Israelite nation already in the 10th century BCE, and so forth. Now, on what specific terms "statehood" is defined—if it is defined at all!—in traditional biblical scholarship on the theme? Were Israel and Judah properly states? Or something else? Furthermore, how does the real socio-political status of these two entities affect our understanding of ancient Palestine's history? In the following lines some proposals will be made that may be useful to answer some of these questions critically.

Evolutionary discourse and biblical discourse

It is no novelty to note that every time scholars have applied anthropological models in biblical studies in order to comprehend the remote social past of early Israel they all have made use of cultural evolutionary approaches. One could not be more in agreement with Niels Peter Lemche's still most valid criticism from the 80's towards the use—and abuse—of these approaches since their results always present us with virtual realities already presupposed in the heuristic model employed.⁷ True, our material evidence from Palestine is so scattered that we must rely on some kind of models that assist scholars in interpreting the archaeological and epigraphic records. But what we have been witnessing so far in recent literature on Iron Age Palestine's political entities is a clear abuse of these models, a curious blend of biblical narratives on the kings of Israel and Judah and heuristic models. This particular mixture not only creates a virtual reality of the past of Israel but also gives traditional and conservative evangelical scholars the proof and the ease of mind of its doubtless historicity.

6. K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996), esp. pp. 122-175. Cf. also in a previous and similar line of criticism P.R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"*. On the modern nature of the term "nation" and what it entails, see E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

7. Cf. N.P. Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VTS, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), pp. 216-219; and also his "On the Use of "System Theory", "Macro Theories" and "Evolutionistic Thinking" in Modern Old Testament Research and Biblical Archaeology", *SJOT* 4 (1990), pp. 73-88. See also the review of socio-scientific approaches in Old Testament studies in C.E. Carter, "A Discipline in Transition: The Contributions of the Social Sciences to the Study of the Hebrew Bible", in C.E. Carter and C.L. Meyers (eds.), *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (SBTS, 6; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 3-36.

Let us see some of the methodology mentioned above in the following quotations:

The approach we shall use in analyzing the 10th-9th century BCE archaeological complex is a simplified version of “General Systems Theory,” which has provided an interpretive paradigm for many archaeologists around the world since the advent of the New Archaeology thirty years ago [...] the basis of the “systematic” approach is simply the assumption that social systems, like biological organisms, are dynamically integrated; composed of several closely coordinated “sub-systems;” tend to seek their own equilibrium (“homeostasis”); and may periodically collapse when one or more of the sub-systems malfunction. The potential application to archaeology is obvious, for even if “General Systems Theory” is not wholly applicable to archaeological data (it is commonly observed that “archaeologists do not dig up social systems”), the overall paradigm provides at least a holistic approach, as well as a practical scheme for organizing the available data.⁸

Also the following statement using a more explicit biological analogy:

Like paleontologically witnessed biological evolution, archaeologically attested social evolution seems to follow a pattern of “punctuated equilibrium” (Steven Jay Gould’s term). Long stretches of time characterized by relative sameness or only minor change are punctuated by sudden and often violent episodes eventuating in wholesale paradigm changes, implying new levels of social organization and cultural expression.⁹

And our third and last example (and perhaps the less radical of them):

Already in the nineteenth century Morgan had suggested that all societies can be divided into two basic forms. One social form, which he termed *societas*, refers to societies based in kinship relations, in which the whole society is perceived as one big and complex family. Morgan suggested that a *societas* undergoes the following evolutionary sequence: Genes → Phratry → Tribe → Nation. In other words, the nation is composed of tribes, the tribes of phratries and the latter of genes or families. The second social form is termed by Morgan *civitas*. Here the social glue is made up of geopolitical and economic interest. The evolutionary sequence of a *civitas* is: City → Country → National Territory. The similarity between Morgan’s *societas* and the Israelites

8. W.G. Dever, “Archaeology and the “Age of Solomon”: A Case-Study in Archaeology and Historiography”, in L.K. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium (SHCANE, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997)*, pp. 217-252 (p. 218). In archaeological theory, criticism towards the “General Systems Theory” approach can already be seen in M. Shanks and Ch. Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 31-41, 138-43; I. Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Chap. 2; to mention here just a few examples of the relevant literature.

9. J.S. Holladay, Jr., “The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron II A-B”, in Th.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), pp. 368-398 (p. 371).

before the monarchy, and between the *civitas* and the Canaanite or Philistine model is self-evident.¹⁰

Each of these statements can be seen as an example of harmonization of discourses aiming to prove the Bible as historically true in terms of scientific possibility: the social evolution depicted in the historical books of the Bible can be understood through cultural evolutionary theory; biblical and evolutionary teleology can be merged into one single interpretative scheme of the archaeological data. Undoubtedly, this is another example of what Philip Davies called early in the 90's "ancient Israel", a modern hybrid made out of the biblical images of Israel and the archaeological and epigraphic finds of an entity called "Israel/Bît Khumri/Samarina" in ancient Palestine.

The last quotation—Juval Portugali's—, that presupposes a necessary transition from nomadism to monarchy, is implicitly reproduced, among many other examples from the bibliography of the last thirty years, in Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger's contribution on "Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State" from 1996.¹¹ Although well informed, this contribution continues the centennial tradition of paraphrasing biblical images of society through rational examples, here taken from anthropological theory on state formation. The author asks what kind of state Saul's and David's kingdoms were,¹² but she never questions if such biblical kingdoms existed at all! This procedure is mainstream among biblical scholars and Syro-Palestinian archaeologists: if we have, on one hand, a biblical progression from Saul to David to Solomon, and we have, on the other hand, a social evolutionary

10. J. Portugali, "Theoretical Speculations on the Transition from Nomadism to Monarchy", in I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (Jerusalem: IES, 1994), pp. 203-217 (p. 213).

11. Ch. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State", in V. Fritz and P.R. Davies (eds.), *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States (JSOT SS, 228; Sheffield: SAP, 1996)*, pp. 78-105.

12. "We may say that Saul's rulership is characterized by the typical features of an inchoative state" (Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Sociological and Biblical Views", p. 99); "On balance, in areas such as population size, territory, political independence and ideology, David's state is—as evidence in biblical texts—in its third phase, namely on the level of the transitional state; whereas in the areas of centralized government, stratification and surplus economy, the stage of the inchoative state has been reached, and some characteristics of the typical early state established" (p. 105). A similar evaluation—that reduces David's biblical empire to a step in the evolutionary typological ladder—can be found in the recent treatments of W.G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 124-157; I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), pp. 123-145; and M. Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia. Storia antica di Israele* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003), pp. 100-113.

progression from chiefdom to early state to full-blown state¹³, all we have to do is match both developments and we will have as a result a rational explanation of how the United Monarchy unfolds throughout the early history of ancient Palestine during Iron Age I. The problem with this explanation is that one cannot mix a literary (the Bible's) narrative on the emergence of the state in ancient Israel—archaeologically unattested¹⁴—with and anthropological armchair theory of the evolution of human societies, that have been under harsh criticism for the last couple of decades (more on this *infra*). And the reason is simple: the biblical authors were not addressing us with the literature they produced; their language, their message, their mindset is not intended—how could it be!—to be directly and uncritically understood by us, inhabitants of a (post)modern world. So when biblical authors refer to a kingdom or an empire we should ask first what they intended to mean with this reference, especially when no traces whatsoever have been found in Palestine of a Davidic kingdom or empire! I think we should read biblical texts—when our goal is writing history out of the remaining materials of Palestine's past—ethnographically, that is, the same way a modern ethnologist would interpret a strange culture to his own.¹⁵ It would be very improper, not to say unscientific, if he or she interprets everything that happens in the society under his scrutiny through his/her Western cultural values and does not allow this society “to speak” in their own terms. At the end of the day,

13. See among others M. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: Random House, 1967); M.D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series; Englewoods Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968); E.R. Service, *The Origins of the State and Civilization: The Process of Cultural Evolution* (New York: Norton, 1975); H. Claessen and P. Skalnik (eds.), *The Early State* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978); R. Cohen and E.R. Service (eds.), *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978); Ch.K. Maisels, *The Emergence of Civilization: From Hunting and Gathering to Agriculture, Cities, and the State in the Near East* (London: Routledge, 1990); T.K. Earle (ed.), *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For an alternative to cultural evolutionary explanations see below.

14. W.G. Dever ('Archaeology and the "Age of Solomon"'); idem, "Histories and Non-Histories of Ancient Israel: The Question of the United Monarchy", in J. Day [ed.], *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar [JSOT SS, 406; London: T & T Clark, 2004]*, pp. 65-94) is one of the most furious reactors against this; I deal with this subject below.

15. Behind this premise resides M. Liverani's important dictum aiming "to view the document not as a "source of information", but as information in itself; not as an opening on a reality laying beyond, but as an element which makes up that reality" ("Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts", *Orientalia* NS 42 [1973], pp. 178-194 [p. 179]). Hardly any critical historian could challenge this methodological principle without being guilty of ethnocentric naïveté. See also on this, N.P. Lemche, "On Doing Sociology with 'Solomon'", in L.K. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium (SHCANE, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997)*, pp. 312-335.

he/she would have a caricature of this society and its cultural practices and what really was going on there would never be known because it never was expected to happen. And this is what occurred in biblical archaeology: for two hundreds years the biblical images, scenarios, figures and events were expected to be dug out of the Palestinian soil; if results did not match our biblical expectations, we would have to continue our faith-driven search. The growing lack of confirmation of the biblical past by archaeology during the second half of the 20th century not only supported the flowering of social-scientific methodology, in order to “save” the historical truth of the Bible, but led us to ignore the non-biblical ancient Palestinian past, a past that has more to do with the historian’s craft than with the biblical Israel of the theologians. In this way, Whitelam’s criticism is really important, for it reminds us as historians of getting back on track to ask the pertinent and important questions for writing many histories of Palestine (including Israel’s histories) and not only those questions related to ancient Israel’s historicity.

Now, besides this awareness of the intellectual nature of the biblical narratives—a nature that is mythic in essence—¹⁶, the historian of ancient Palestine must deal too with the material nature of the biblical accounts of Israel’s past. Clearly the biblical texts we have at our disposal as manuscripts do not belong to the Iron Age but to Medieval times; the Dead Sea Scrolls (3rd century BCE to 1st century CE) would be our most ancient evidence so far of biblical texts in the making; but they are irrelevant for understanding the Iron Age’s socio-political dynamics. Thus until we find evidence of the contrary to this, we cannot use the Old Testament or any extant biblical text as a primary source for history writing nor for the study of Iron Age Palestine’s social structures.¹⁷ This is not an ideological preference, rather it is a proper methodological standing which cannot be ignored, and biblical scholars as well as Syro-Palestinian archaeologists must acknowledge it when they wish to write history. We must attend to our primary sources (archaeological finds), make an interpretation out of them and then see if they have anything to do with the biblical past.

Having said this now, a proper use of social-scientific models would rely on the interpretation of the archaeological record alone, without having the Bible in mind, to see if in that way our knowledge of the history of ancient

16. See Thompson, *The Bible in History*, *passim*. Not many scholars have clearly understood what Thompson meant to say with his book. The use of the term “myth” here is not related to our modern logical categories of “true” and “false”, where “myth” equals “false”. A mythic narrative presents reality in a different way than one could rationally understand it. This is one of the reasons why to apply rationalistic (social-scientific) models to biblical images of ancient realities is methodologically wrong. See Wyatt, “The Mythic Mind”; and any of Mircea Eliade’s essays, i.e., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1959) and *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

17. See Lemche, *The Israelites*, pp. 22-34; I. Hjelm, “Whose Bible Is It Anyway? Ancient Authors, Medieval Manuscripts and Modern Perceptions”, *SJOT* 18 (2004), pp. 108-134.

Palestine may be improved. In what follows, I review the archaeological evidence presented as supporting an early Israelite state and later I will offer an alternative historical-anthropological understanding of Iron Age Palestine's socio-political dynamics.

The Archaeology of Ancient Palestine and Statehood

As it was noted before, there seems to exist a clear confluence between the rational explanations that scholars present to understand how statehood appeared in Iron Age Palestine and the biblical accounts on the United Monarchy. If we take a non-biblical view to the archaeological reports and synthesis from Palestine, we will see that the reasons maintained for defending the idea of "Israelite statehood" at all costs become fragile and subsequently refuted.

In recent years W.G. Dever has indicated that "the archaeological evidence for increasing political complexity and centralization consists largely of what have been regarded as planned cities with "royal monumental" architecture. These are principally Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, all best described as regional administrative centers [...] dating broadly to the mid-late 10th century BCE and constituting archaeological evidence of state-level political organizations",¹⁸ and that "the single most significant criterion for defining "statehood" is centralization of power".¹⁹ Dever points out at a series of traits—in a Childean fashion—that according to him would mark statehood without any doubt in Iron Age Palestine: "1) size; 2) socio-economic stratification; 3) institutionalized political administration; 4) ability to produce surplus and sustain long-distance trade; 5) monumental art and architecture, and 6) the use of writing".²⁰ Now, first of all, archaeology has not shown yet that Jerusalem existed as an urbanized center, capital of an empire or kingdom during the 10th or 9th centuries BCE.²¹ Hardly, the site would have a demography of more than 2000 people, devoted to agriculture and not to rule an empire. This would rule out # 1) and # 2). The only way of defending an "institutionalized political administration" (# 3) in late Iron I Palestine (*ca.* 1200-1000 BCE) or early Iron II is granting historicity to the twelve adminis-

18. Dever, "Archaeology and "The Age of Solomon"", p. 226. See also *idem*, "Monumental Architecture in Ancient Israel in the Period of the United Monarchy", in T. Ishida (ed.), *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), pp. 269-306

19. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know*, p. 126.

20. Dever, "Archaeology and "The Age of Solomon"", p. 245.

21. See the essays in A.G. Vaughn and A.E. Killebrew (eds.), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (SBLSS, 18; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), especially those of I. Finkelstein, "The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link" (pp. 81-101); D. Ussishkin, "Solomon's Jerusalem: The Texts and the Facts of the Ground" (pp. 103-115); G. Lehmann, "The United Monarchy in the Countryside: Jerusalem, Judah, and the Shephelah during the Tenth Century BCE" (pp. 117-162); and A.E. Killebrew, "Biblical Jerusalem: An Archaeological Assessment" (pp. 329-345).

trative districts” list from 1 Kings 4:7-19, something not done yet.²² Neither Hazor, Megiddo or Gezer are *per se* irrefutable proof of statehood’s centralization (*contra* Dever’s interpretation of trait # 5). Against Dever, and as Schäfer-Lichtenberger has said some years ago in another context, archaeology itself will not automatically tell us what the social organization of ancient Palestine was like.²³ Centralization and monumentality are features not exclusive to statehood; chiefdoms also have them—no-one would say, for instance, that behind the monumentality of the Stonehenge ruins in England lays a state formation.²⁴ Furthermore, in Middle Bronze II Palestine (*ca.* 1800-1650 BCE) analogous monumentality (i.e., gateways) can be found related to the so-called Canaanite “city-states”, especially Hazor and Dan.²⁵ These “city-states” were not proper state formations; instead, in them “local political structures were hardly bureaucratically advanced beyond a primitive form of oriental despotism of little consequence to the broader social or political economy, and one must think of the “kings” and the councils of these city-states at best as village headmen, chieftains and landowners, dependent more on their own personal influence and wealth in land than on any civil bureaucracy or class structure for their power,” as Thompson says.²⁶ Thus

22. Unless one follows Dever’s “hermeneutic circle” methodology: see Dever, “Histories and Non-Histories of Ancient Israel”, pp. 78-79. But cf. Th.L. Thompson, “Historiography of Ancient Palestine and Early Jewish Historiography: W.G. Dever and the Not So New Biblical Archaeology”, in V. Fritz and P.R. Davies (eds.), *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States (JSOT SS, 228; Sheffield: SAP, 1996)*, pp. 26-43.

23. “Die Frage, welche politische Verfassung Israel und Juda im 10. Jh hatten, ein Häuptlingstum oder einen Staat, kann nicht von der Archäologie entschieden werden” (Ch. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, “Zur Funktion der Soziologie im Studium des Alten Testaments”, in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø [eds.], *IOSOT Congress Volume – Oslo 1998 [VTS, 80; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000]*, pp. 179-202 [pp. 185-186]).

24. Cf. T.K. Earle, “Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987), pp. 279-308, esp. 285ff. In a complex chiefdom “the settlement pattern is dominated by several independent centers that contain planned mound complexes, monumental art and elite residences” (p. 286).

25. This has been already pointed out in E. Pfoh, “De patrones y clientes. Sobre la continuidad de las prácticas sociopolíticas en la antigua Palestina”, *Antiguo Oriente* 2 (2004), pp. 51-74, esp. 59-66. Cf. A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000-586 BCE (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1990)*, pp. 174-231, esp. 180-182, 198-213; D. Ilan, “The Dawn of Internationalism—The Middle Bronze Age”, in Th.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), pp. 297-319.

26. Thompson, *Early History*, p. 194. A similar description of socio-political structure can be found in Late Bronze Age Ugarit: see M. Liverani, “La royauté syrienne à l’âge du Bronze Récent”, in P. Garelli (ed.), *Le palais et la royauté (XIXe RAI; Paris: P. Geuthner, 1974)*, pp. 329-356, where the Ugaritic king is depicted more as a *primus inter pares* than a proper head of state with the monopoly of coercion within society. Liverani says that the king not only had to deal with his Hittite or Egyptian

there is no necessary reason to link exclusively monumentality with statehood.

During the Late Bronze Age, under Egyptian rule, this situation is not much altered. As Lorenzo Nigro says:

Il passaggio al Bronzo Tardo avviene gradualmente, sebbene segnato in maniera netta da alcuni eventi storici precisi, e comporta la riorganizzazione politica e sociale della Palestina sotto il dominio egiziano, che ha come effetto una parziale ridefinizione del ruolo politico ed economico dell'istituzione palatina e della sua espressione architettonica. Solamente in alcuni grandi centri (Hazor, Megiddo, Sichem e forse Gezer e Gerico), che conservano lo *status* di città-stato, sono attestati veri e propri palazzi, mentre gran parte delle cittadine palestinesi sono rette da signori locali che erigono per sé un nuovo ruolo genere di fabbrica palatina: la residenza.

La formazione di questa nuova tipologia palatina è tipica della Palestina, della quale riflette la scala cantonale dei potentati politici ed economici e la condizione di assoggettamento al potere straniero.²⁷

The fragmentary disposition of Late Bronze Palestine “urban” centers—as Nigro indicates—plays a major role in the configuration of its socio-political organization. The Bronze Age Southern Levant’s socio-political units are characterized by an inner structure anchored in a hierarchy of kinship and personal ties of bondage which never reach any regional extension beyond its topographical limits.²⁸ Now, what happens after the Late Bronze/Iron Age transition? The demise of Egyptian power in the Levant during the 12th-11th centuries BCE²⁹ supposed a power vacuum in the region which allowed ultimately Iron Age II kingdoms to rise. But, according to the archaeological

overlords but also with “his men”: should he not care for their economic welfare, they could certainly replace him (pp. 348-356).

27. L. Nigro, *Ricerche sull'architettura palaziale della Palestina nelle età del Bronzo e del Ferro. Contesto archeologico e sviluppo storico* (CMAO, 5; Roma: Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”, 1995), p. 119. See also J.D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (SAHL, 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), pp. 329-342 for an interpretation of archaeological data from Ugarit related to the dependence of the agricultural hinterland from an urban center, linked through kinship ties, not bureaucratic administration.

28. See J. Sapin, “La géographie humaine de la Syrie-Palestine au deuxième millénaire avant J.C. comme voie de recherche historique”, *JESHO* 24 (1981), pp. 1-62. Also Thompson, *Early History*, pp. 316-334; and for the Late Bronze Age, cf. I. Finkelstein, “The Territorial-Political System of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age”, *UF* 28 (1996), pp. 221-255; and A. James, “Egypt and Her Vassals: The Geopolitical Dimension” in R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2000), pp. 112-124, esp. 112.

29. See D.B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 241-256, 283-297.

record alone, can we be certain that these new entities are full-blown states? If we just make a comparison between palaces and monumental buildings from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and those belonging of Iron Age II we will see that an evolution from “city-states” or “complex chiefdoms” to “state structures” is something not clearly evident from the remains alone.³⁰ Certainly, there are traces of perhaps some quantitative progression thanks to the vacuum left by the Egyptians withdrawal, but one could not assure that this progression is qualitative and informs us of statehood features. Indeed, from Iron I to Iron IIB there is a certain centralization from the countryside towards a number of new and old urban centers attested. Following A. Faust, G. Lehmann says that

The abandonment of the small villages during Iron Age IIA was due mainly to the increasing defence needs, which could be found only in larger settlements. In response to the need for protection, inhabitants of the numerous smaller villages abandoned their settlements and moved to the larger villages, resulting in their growth in size and population. Faust argues that during the Iron Age IIB these settlements became the nucleus of the beginning urbanization in the mountain regions.³¹

Certainly, all this speaks in favor of the emergence of new entities, but what is relevant here is that all these new settlements were organized through kinship ties, similarly to what is commonly referred to as “tribal organization” without any traces heading to statehood.³² All this makes Dever’s insistence on seeing early Iron Age’s archaeological assemblages as paving the way to statehood very doubtful: why is statehood attested by archaeologists in the Iron Age but not in the Middle Bronze Age? The answer to this lays only in the biblical images of a United Monarchy rising in the beginnings of the 1st

30. Cf. Nigro, *Ricerche sull’architettura*, pp. 39, 42, 44, 49, 51, 56, 58, 60, 64, 66, 68, 76, 99, 110, 116 (Middle Bronze) and pp. 197, 218, 220, 227, 231, 236, 255, 258, 278, 284 (Iron I-II).

31. Lehmann, “The United Monarchy in the Countryside”, p. 121. See also the demographic maps in I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: IES, 1988), pp. 95, 115 and 189. This development finds place in the broader demographic history of Palestine: cf. I. Finkelstein, “The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millennia BCE”, in I. Finkelstein and N. Na’aman, (eds.) *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (Jerusalem: IES, 1994), pp. 150-178.

32. Cf. Lehmann, “The United Monarchy”, pp. 136-146. “The observations of this essay throw strong doubts on the concept of a fully developed monarchy with a complex territorial state-organization in the hill country during the tenth century BCE. Lacking a centralized settlement structure, Judah was apparently organized in local kinship groups. The structural analysis does not suggest any regional framework that integrated these groups in a long-term process of statehood. At best there was an alliance of kinship groups and villages” (p. 160).

millennium BCE,³³ obstructing for the historian a right comprehension of the previous and later history of Palestine.

Returning to Dever's Childean list, traits # 4 and # 6 are easily dismissed. The ability to produce surplus and maintain long-distance trade is something that has been taking place in the Middle East with *and* without any state's control for the last 5000 years. The ethnographic record shows us, for instance, nomads extracting profits from their own relatives outside the sphere of any institutionalized organization;³⁴ and long-distance trade is attested in the archaeological record already from pre-historic (i.e., non-state) times.³⁵ Lastly, the use of writing in Palestine from *ca.* 1000 to 600 BCE³⁶ is mostly "ideological" in character, that is, it does not deal with more mundane aspects such as trade lists, archival data, etc.—things that would be expected to appear in a state's administration. As for the evidence of seals and bullae (usually linked to Judah's bureaucracy), it could well fit into a patronage model for interpreting Palestinian society of the Iron Age (see further *infra*). These inscriptions are better evidence of the intellectual world of ancient Palestine—a world shared with the rest of the Near East³⁷—than of the historicity of biblical characters and the social world depicted in biblical narratives—the Tel Dan stele would also fall into this interpretive category.³⁸ Summing up, all this does not mean that Gordon Childe's trait list is wrong; it only means that Dever has used it wrongly, ignoring the important light that a really non-biblical view can shed on the archaeology of Palestine, and testifying a "convergence" between the biblical period and a historical United Monarchy as his main goal.³⁹ This trait list certainly characterizes statehood, but it does not constitute it by itself. Instead it is the state that makes such traits possible to

33. Cf. the criticism in Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, pp. 37-70.

34. Cf. J. Black, "Tyranny as a Strategy for Survival in an "Egalitarian" Society: Luri Facts versus an Anthropological Mystique", *Man* NS 7 (1972), pp. 614-634. Cf. also for a comprehensive review of nomads and urban dwellers in the Middle East, Lemche, *Early Israel*, pp. 84-244.

35. Cf. C. Renfrew, "Trade as Action at a Distance: Questions of Integration and Communication", in J.A. Sabloff and C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (eds.), *Ancient Civilization and Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), pp. 3-59.

36. See the recent summary in A. Lemaire, "Hebrew and West Semitic Inscriptions and Pre-Exilic Israel", in J. Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar (JSOT SS, 406; London: T & T Clark, 2004)*, pp. 366-385.

37. Cf. Th.L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), *passim*.

38. See N.P. Lemche and Th.L. Thompson, "Did Biran Kill David? The Bible in the Light of Archaeology", *JSOT* 64 (1994), pp. 3-22; Th.L. Thompson, "'House of David': An Eponymic Referent to Yahweh as Godfather", *SJOT* 9 (1995), pp. 59-74; N.P. Lemche, "'House of David': The Tel Dan Inscription(s)", in Th.L. Thompson (ed.), *Jerusalem in Ancient History and Tradition (JSOT SS, 381/CIS, 13; London: T & T Clark, 2003)*, pp. 46-67.

39. Cf. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know*, pp. 124ff.

appear in a first place. What constitutes statehood is a unique socio-political practice which is particular and exclusive to states and that is not attested in kinship-based societies (i.e., chiefdoms): the institutionalized monopoly of coercion/power.⁴⁰ This presents a severe critique on holistic evolutionary approaches such as the ones by Dever, Holladay and Portugali (quoted above) and many others because what it must be acknowledged here is that the progression from non-state societies to state societies *is not quantitative but qualitative*. An infinite numbering of statehood's characteristics means nothing if the existence of the practice of the monopoly of power has not been verified properly (see *infra*). From the perspective I hold here, this practice is not attested in Palestine, at least from what we can interpret out of the archaeological record without the biblical stories in mind.

The Bible has its own tale to tell. But this tale is not of much historical help for us. Having the Bible's stories of the United Monarchy removed from our historical interpretation of Palestine's past allows new avenues of understanding to emerge. I think one useful choice is to study the ethnographical record of the modern Middle East in order to find out a spectrum of possible analogies that might allow us a better understanding of the epigraphic and archaeological materials.

An Alternative Historical-Anthropological Approach

The use of social-scientific models for understanding the emergence of statehood, social complexity or whatever we may call it, can only be helpful for historical purposes when applied to primary data, i.e., archaeological and epigraphic remains—not the Bible, which as an “artifact” undoubtedly belongs to the span between the late second half of the 1st millennium BCE and early 1st millennium CE.⁴¹ An anthropological analysis of, for instance, the books of Judges or Samuel will only tell scholars about an idea of social structure assumed in the narrative⁴² but it will never give us historical data about a period in the history of Palestine unless we find extra-biblical evidence for this. Paula McNutt's *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* makes a fine use of anthropological data for understanding the diachronic social development of ancient Israel. However, she cannot prove, e.g., that

40. Cf. M. Campagno, “Pierre Clastres y el surgimiento del Estado—Veinte años después”, *Boletín de Antropología Americana* 33 (1998), pp. 101-113; idem, “Hacia un uso no-evolucionista del concepto de ‘sociedades de jefatura’”, *Boletín de Antropología Americana* 36 (2000), pp. 137-147. Of course, the reference is to M. Weber's category.

41. Cf. N.P. Lemche, “The Old Testament—A Hellenistic Book?”, *SJOT* 7 (1993), pp. 163-193.

42. Cf. P. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), pp. 64-103. The same criticism goes to F.S. Frick's rationalistic analysis of the biblical conflict between Philistines and Israelites ending up in a process from chiefdom to state organization out of functional causes (*The Formation of the State in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Models and Theories* [SWBAS, 4; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985], pp. 58-60, 66-68, 191, 196, and 203).

Judges or Samuel belong to Iron Age I. The assumption of a United Monarchy makes the tribal characteristics of these book's narratives to be dated to *circa* the 11th century BCE, but—again—only because a progression from “tribe” to “state” is assumed to have happened in the archaeological record, and is supported by the biblical account. But for the last 5000 years “tribal” structures and dynamics, as they may be identified in Judges or Samuel, have been active in the Middle East, so such a historical methodology is simply wrong and it just creates a virtual image of Palestine's past (another example of Davies' “ancient Israel”). The interpretive path here is quite different. We should attend first to the ethnographic record of the Middle East in order to find analogies that might be useful for understanding the archaeological and epigraphic data.

In his *Early Israel* from 1985 Lemche said about the characteristics of “tribal” societies in the modern Middle East:

[...] it would be unwise to overestimate the powers of a tribal leader with respect to his tribal kinsmen, since in most cases he does not control a power apparatus capable of executing his decisions against the wishes of the ordinary member of the tribe. The tribal leader ordinarily does not dispose over a body capable of subduing the other members of the tribe to his will, and in fact there are only a limited number of areas in which his will is ultimately decisive. The areas in which the leader of the tribe has no say include in the first rank matters pertaining to the individual families, especially their economic affairs. Further, he has no authority in matters involving several families within a lineage. By the same token, the tribal leader is also in principle powerless with respect to corresponding cases taking place higher up the social ladder, that is, at the level of the lineage or the tribal section, unless he is employed as an arbitrator between such fractions.⁴³

In a recent history of modern Palestine/Israel, Ilan Pappé has characterized Ottoman Palestine administration the following way:

Each Ottoman administrative sub-unit (*nahiya*) consisted of several villages. Each sub-unit was controlled by a sheikh, the head of the strongest clan. Although a kind of semi-feudal baron, a sheikh belonged to the poorest socio-economic stratum in the land. First among equals, he represented his own clan and others before the authorities, and disseminated to his people the politics from above. Unlike the urban notables, these destitute leaders were often in a precarious position. They were judged according to their capabilities as tax collectors, but no less important was their ability to reconcile conflicting clans and clamp down on blood feuds.⁴⁴

Now, why is all this relevant here? Instead of providing an example of what the extent of the power of Saul, David or Solomon may have looked like if

43. Lemche, *Early Israel*, p. 120.

44. I. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine. One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 15.

there is no archaeological room for an early Israelite empire,⁴⁵ the ethnographic data offers us a far better way of trying to understand how the Iron Age I-II societies were structured and how they functioned taking into account their archaeological remains. Thus if we take for granted that Iron Age I societies had a kinship-based social structure, we could assume as well the presence of special individuals—as the ones depicted above in the modern Middle East ethnographic examples—with *prestige* within their own community or society. Prestige, for instance, allows these individuals to lead their kinsmen into battle, performing a kind of leadership otherwise—in times of peace—absent in “tribal” societies. Many times, the prestige of individuals, obtained mostly in war scenes with demonstration of courage and bravery but also acquired for their belonging to a main lineage within the “tribe”, grant them a sustained leadership which changes a presumably “egalitarian” society into a hierarchical one, known in anthropological literature as “chiefdom”. Let me quote again some important anthropological remarks of this:

A chiefdom is a relatively homogeneous confederacy by comparison to more organized states, which are higher political forms on the evolutionary scale [*sic*]. But it may also exhibit a certain degree of heterogeneity in terms of its origins, culture and class composition. It is a power sharing partnership involving pastoral nomads on the margins of cultivation, demisedentarized (especially agriculturalists) tribesmen, occasionally urban dwellers, and a ruler or chief domiciled in a town or in the countryside. In a chiefdom the nomads and semisedentarized tribesmen are expected to refrain from internal disruptions and to contribute military forces for protection and expansion. In return, town dwellers are expected to provide these rural forces with access to marketing and organized religion. The chief's function is to supervise the partnership. In chiefdoms the bonds between the chief and society are not necessarily institutionalized; they tend more often to be based on personal and ad hoc arrangements. In such circumstances the various societal segments of the chiefdom, notably the tribes, remain intact and still enjoy a considerable degree of political maneuverability and cultural and economical autonomy.⁴⁶

45. See the ethno-historical example in H.M. Niemann, “The Socio-Political Shadow Cast by the Biblical Solomon”, in L.K. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium* (SHCANE, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 265-267. I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman's recent use of this analogy seems to be heuristically better aimed (“Shechem of the Amarna Period and the Rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel”, *IEJ* 55 [2005], pp. 172-193), although they also regard—as Niemann does—David and Solomon to be historically probable figures: see further I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of Western Civilization* (New York: Free Press, 2006). For a critical review of all this see Th.L. Thompson, “Archaeology and the Bible Revisited: A Review Article”, *SJOT* 20 (2006), pp. 286-313.

46. P.S. Khoury and J. Kostiner, “Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East”, in P.S. Khoury and J. Kostiner (ed.), *Tribes and State*

Chiefdoms are regarded in cultural evolutionism's theories as the previous step to statehood.⁴⁷ It is assumed that the chief's prestige will eventually grow into total power within society until the chiefdom evolves into a proto-state and finally into a fully developed state. Again, as we already observed, this progression concurs with the stories of Saul, David and Solomon. Now, has this happened in 10th century BCE Palestine? Or better asked, could this have happened? My answer to this last question is that there are many obstacles for this unilineal progression to have taken place. First of all, there exists plenty of ethnographic data that denies the possibility that chiefs universally evolve "given some time" into state leaders.⁴⁸ The basic explanation says that a kinship society, like a chiefdom, prevents its members from gaining the monopoly of power within society, *a*) because power belongs to the whole of society and not to a specific individual; *b*) there is no institutionalized power office in these societies; when circumstances make necessary to take decisions, one individual is appointed to lead temporarily the society—in war times, for instance—, usually that member who possess more prestige among his equals; but as soon as circumstances go back to normality, the society removes "the sum of all powers" from this individual who now, in sociopolitical terms, turns out to be just like any other of the members of society.

As Lemche indicates:

[...] the central concept in this apparently contradictory account is *prestige*. The kinsmen of the tribal leader regard him as the exceptional individual in the tribe, for which reason he is assigned special importance [...] The

Formation in the Middle East (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 1-22 (p. 8).

47. See R. Carneiro, "The Chiefdom: Precursor of the State", in G.D. Jones and R.R. Kautz (eds.), *The Transition to Statehood in the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 37-79; T.K. Earle, "Chiefdoms in Archaeological"; idem, "The Evolution of Chiefdoms", en T.K. Earle (ed.), *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-15, among other studies (but see the following footnote). The understanding of David and Solomon as heads of chiefdoms in the central highlands of Palestine has been argued by D.W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach*, (SWBAS, 9/ JSOT SS, 106; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), pp. 142-44; E.A. Knauf, "King Solomon's Copper Supply", in E. Lipiński (ed.), *Phoenicia and the Bible: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Leuven on 15th and 16th of March 1990*, (OLA, 44; Leuven: Peeters, 1991), pp. 167-186, here p. 180 n. 54; Niemann, "The Sociopolitical Shadow", pp. 260 n. 19, 290-93; Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 190.

48. One of the first anthropologists presenting evidence favoring this was the French Pierre Clastres; see his *La société contre l'Etat* (Paris: Minuit, 1974). See further now Campagno, "Pierre Clastres y el surgimiento del Estado"; idem, "Hacia un uso ne-evolucionista del concepto de 'sociedades de jefatura'"; N. Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

sheikh's prestige is associated with a number of factors of which only a few can be mentioned here; these are such qualities wealth, warlike accomplishments, and eloquence. Therefore a leader who is not equal to the task confronting him will not be able to remain in power. If he is found to be inadequate, he can be deposed without more ado and replaced by another. In certain eventualities an entire family may be removed from power if it has supported a weak tribal leader chosen from its ranks too long.⁴⁹

This non-evolutionary explanation has appeared in the context of the study of pre-statal societies, or the conditions for the emergence of "primary states" (Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, India, etc.).⁵⁰ But what about Palestinian societies which in an early 1st millennium context know without any doubt of the existence of other state formations? The emergence of states in this context has been rendered by anthropologists as "secondary state formation".⁵¹ Therefore, these states arise from an emulation of other states or directly by marked influence from them. Yet, could this have happened in Palestine and so explain the rise of Israel and Judah? I think the poor socioeconomic conditions of Palestine prevents that such a secondary state formation takes place; not because it is impossible that Palestinian kinglets want to be heads of states but because the basic lack of resources forced them to rely on personal bonding for maintaining the control of society. Perhaps a better hypothesis is to see the transition from Iron I to Iron IIB as a development from a kinship ("egalitarian" or better said non-hierarchical) society to a more hierarchical society, i.e. a "complex chiefdom". Khoury and Kostiner say that:

It was when chiefdoms established themselves in cities and drew on urban financial and human resources that they became something different. Expansion led to the incorporation of new population, territories, and sources of wealth in a chiefdom; consequently, tribal society became increasingly stratified. In such circumstances political and economic power might become centralized in the hands of the chiefs and emerging regional elites, who were often linked to him by a mix of kinship and socioeconomic ties. The demands of warfare, distribution, and trade created the need for centralized control, as distinct from centralized management.⁵²

I wouldn't see any reason to deny this descriptive anthropological model as a fair explanation of socio-political development in Palestine from Iron I to Iron II as seen in the archaeological record. As I said, the need for speaking of "states" here is due to the wish to corroborate a biblical United Monarchy in Palestinian soil. But what happens if we forget—at least for a moment—

49. Lemche, *Early Israel*, p. 120.

50. For the case of Ancient Egypt, see M. Campagno, *De los jefes-parientes a los reyes-dioses. Surgimiento y consolidación del Estado en el antiguo Egipto*, (*AE*, 3; Barcelona, Aula Aegyptiaca, 2002).

51. Cf. B.J. Price, "Secondary State Formation: An Explanatory Model", in R. Cohen and E.R. Service (eds.), *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), pp. 161-186.

52. Khoury and Kostiner, "Introduction", p. 11.

the biblical stories of Saul, David and Solomon? I am convinced that this last option will give us much needed help for explaining the emergence of “Israel”/“The House of Omri” in Iron Age Palestine.

On Patronage Societies

For some years now N.P. Lemche has been arguing in favor of a “patronage society” model for interpreting ancient Palestine’s society.⁵³ Apart from very few exceptions,⁵⁴ most scholars have ignored this proposal—yet it could be perhaps the best way of understanding not only Israelite (Palestinian) society but also an ancient theology implicit in biblical texts.⁵⁵ Now, what is a “patronage society” about?⁵⁶ Basically, it is a well known phenomenon in traditional Mediterranean societies in which a basic social and political unit is

53. N.P. Lemche, “Kings and Clients: On Loyalty between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient ‘Israel’”, in D.A. Knight (ed.), *Ethics and Politics in the Hebrew Bible (Semeia, 66; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995)*, pp. 119-132; idem, “Justice in Western Asia in Antiquity, or: Why No Laws Were Needed!”, *Chicago Kent Law Review* 70 (1995), pp. 1695-1716; idem, “From Patronage Society to Patronage Society”, in V. Fritz and P.R. Davies (eds.), *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States, (JSOT SS, 228; Sheffield: SAP, 1996)*, pp. 106-120; idem, “The Relevance of Working with the Concept of Class in the Study of the Israelite Society in the Iron Age”, in M.R. Sneed (ed.), *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel (SFSHJ, 201; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999)*, pp. 89-98; idem, “Power and Social Organization: Some Misunderstanding and Some Proposals: Or Is It all a Question of Patrons and Clients?”, in Th.L. Thompson (ed.), *Changing Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* (forthcoming).

54. Except for Thompson’s recent work, I could find only a few antecedents in Old Testament studies in the treatments of H. Niehr, “The Constitutive Principles for Establishing Justice and Order in Northwest Semitic Societies with Special Reference to Ancient Israel and Judah”, *ZABR* 3 (1997), pp. 112-130; McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, pp. 120-136, 170-172; R.A. Simkins, “Patronage and the Political Economy of Monarchic Israel”, in R.A. Simkins and S.L. Cook (eds.), *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-Five Years of Social Sciences in the Academy (Semeia, 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999)*, pp. 123-144; and in a broader scope, R. Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East”, *JESHO* 48 (2005), pp. 210-233. In New Testament studies, it’s well known the work of B.J. Malina, i.e. his *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2001); see also J.K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth (JSNT SS, 75; Sheffield: SAP, 1992)*.

55. See N.P. Lemche, “Justice in Western Asia in Antiquity”; idem, “The Relevance of Social-Critical Exegesis for Old Testament Theology”, in Th.L. Thompson (ed.), *Changing Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* (forthcoming); Thompson, *The Bible in History*, pp. 45-52, 305-317; idem, *The Messiah Myth*, pp. 248-258.

56. See J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean. An Essay on Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1977); E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds.), *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); S. Eisenstadt y L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends. Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

established between a powerful, usually wealthy, individual (a *patron*) and a poor member of society (a *client*); reciprocity marks the bond, but this reciprocity is not balanced, rather it is unequal because it is the patron who establishes the rules of the relationship: he offers protection and assistance to his *clientelae* in exchange for individual loyalty and obedience.⁵⁷ The patron-client units expand their bonds up and down, forming a pyramidal socio-political network where lesser patrons are at the same time clients of greater patrons and so on, until reaching the ultimate patron (which could be in this case the Egyptian or the Hittite⁵⁸ kings during the Late Bronze Age, or the Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian kings in Iron Age times). This social bond has been active in the Mediterranean basin until our days since at least Roman times (and earlier in the Near East), and it is the formal expression of a cluster of values that characterizes traditional Mediterranean societies, among others honor and prestige.⁵⁹ Interestingly, patronage is an important factor in the dynamics of the so-called Middle Eastern “tribal states”,⁶⁰ which causes modern Western analysts quite a few troubles for understanding how such “states” are run without a formal bureaucracy! The relevance of this here is that one can find traces of patronage bonds in ancient Palestine’s textual remains. In fact, and following Mario Liverani’s seminal contributions,⁶¹ Lem-

57. See Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, pp. 252-263 *et passim*.

58. The Egyptians were not interested in patronage bonds with Palestinian kinglets (see M. Liverani, “Contrasti e confluente di concezioni politiche nell’età di El-Amarna”, *RA* 61 [1967], pp. 1-18), but the Hittites did make use of a “protectorate system” with their conquered subjects from Syria that may well be understood as foreign patronage; see the description in F. Imparati, “Die Organisation des hethitischen Staates”, in H. Klengel, *Geschichte des Hethitischen Reiches*, unter mitwirkung von F. Imparati, V. Haas & Th.P.J. van den Hout, (*HdO*; Abt. 1; Nahe und Mittlere Osten, Bd. 34; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 320-387, esp. 359-363, 365ff.

59. Cf. J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1965); J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); D.F. Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach* (4th ed.; Englewoods Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001); M.À. Roque (ed.), *Nueva antropología de las sociedades mediterráneas* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2000); idem, *Antropología mediterránea: prácticas compartidas* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2005).

60. See the essays in Khoury and Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation*, *op.cit.*, esp. R. Tapper, “Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East”, pp. 48-73; E. Gellner, “Tribalism and the State in the Middle East”, pp. 109-126; and B. Tibi, “The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East”, pp. 127-152.

61. See M. Liverani, “Contrasti e confluente”; idem, “Political Lexicon and Political Ideologies in the Amarna Letters”, *Berytus* 31 (1983), pp. 41-56. Cf. also his *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East, ca. 1600-1100 B.C.* (History of the Ancient Near East/ Studies 1; Sargon SRL: Padua, 1990) = Italian revised edition: *Guerra e diplomazia nell’antico Oriente, 1600-1100 a.C.* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1994).

che has proposed to see in the El Amarna correspondence of Late Bronze Age Palestine traces of a clash between the socio-political mindset of the Palestinian petty kings—anchored in patronage—and the bureaucratic administration of the land by Egypt, which being impersonal has no room for the personal bonds that we find in a patronage relationship. I consider an analysis of the El Amarna evidence, favoring Lemche's hypothesis, indeed to be fruitful.⁶² And one of the main features for arguing this is the presence of “family language” or kinship metaphors and personal bonding (“father”, “son”, “brother”; also “friend”) in these epistles,⁶³ something usually displayed in modern patron-client relationships.⁶⁴ Indeed, this “family language” plays a major role in Late Bronze Age diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its presence is not innocent as it can certainly be linked with the idea of patrimonialism in the ancient Near East. As J.D. Schloen has recently said:

Household language—the use of terms such as “house”, “father”, “son”, “brother”, “master”, and “servant” in an extended political sense—carries more significance than is usually thought, for it reveals the self-understanding of the social order that was at work in these societies. These terms were used metaphorically, to be sure, but this does not mean that they were casual figures of speech or euphemisms for “real” economic and political relationships. They were widely used because alternative conceptions of social hierarchy were not readily available. In the absence of the rather abstract idea than an impersonal political constitution or universal egalitarian social contract might underpin the social order, personal relationships patterned on the household model served to integrate society and to legitimate the exercise of power.⁶⁵

But one really interesting possibility is Lemche's other hypothesis defending the survival of patronage bonds in Palestinian society following the Late Bronze / Iron I transition.⁶⁶ If he is right, this would place the emergence of the Iron Age novel entities (Aram, Moab, Edom, and of course Israel and Judah) under new interpretive light. Can all these kingdoms be understood under the dynamics of a patronage society? Once more, I think the answer is a firm “yes”.

In fact, we can conceive all of the Iron Age Levant kingdoms as having a main “tribal” factor leading their inner social structure and dynamics—

62. Cf. the textual and socio-anthropological analysis in E. Pfoh, “Reyes y “parientes” en la época de El Amarna en Palestina”, in M. Campagno (ed.), *Estudios sobre parentesco y Estado en el Antiguo Egipto* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires / Ediciones del Signo, 2006), pp. 167-188. For a translation of the El Amarna letters, see W.L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

63. See e.g. EA 112, 158, 207 and 225 (among others) in Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, pp. 186, 244, 280, 288.

64. Cf. Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, pp. 269-282.

65. Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 255.

66. Lemche, “From Patronage Society”.

“tribal” means here that kinship and especially lineage is the key organizing factor of society as a whole. Recently, Ø.S. LaBianca and R.W. Younker have characterized Ammon, Moab and Edom under this description, where “tribalism” conducted the political lives of these kingdoms.⁶⁷ And in a recent major treatment, P.-E. Dion has described the Aramean kingdoms of the Iron Age in this very same way. The rendering of the “Bît-X” naming of these kingdoms has an obvious (real or fictive, it is not relevant here) kinship meaning, and the role the Aramean kings display within society gathers many of the features detectable in “tribal” societies, though in a more sophisticated way.⁶⁸ There would be then no reason to believe that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were organized in a different way.

As indicated above, patronage relations might have been important too for the appearance of the biblical covenant idea as the idea of justice and protection is similar,⁶⁹ and—at the time—one cannot ignore the link between covenantal formulae and the Neo-Assyrian treaties.⁷⁰ In fact, every culture portrays ideological representations of current social relationships within it. So it would be not unthinkable at all to suggest that if patronage relations worked throughout the socio-political realm of Israel and Judah in ancient Palestine,

67. Ø.S. LaBianca and R.W. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400-500 BCE)”, in Th.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), pp. 399-415, esp. 403-410; see also E.A. Knauf, “The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation: The Cases of the Edomites and Moabites”, in P. Bienkowski, (ed.), *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, (SAM, 7; Sheffield: J.R. Collins, 1992), pp. 47-54; B. Routledge, “The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab”, *JESHO* 43 (2000), pp. 221-256.

68 P.-E. Dion, *Les araméens à l'âge du fer: Histoire politique et structures sociales* (Études Bibliques, Nouvelle Série. N° 34; Paris: Gabalda, 1997), pp. 225-247.

69. Cf. Niehr, “The Constitutive Principles”, pp. 119-127.

70. See E.A. Knauf, “L’‘Historiographie Deutéronomiste’ (DTRG) existe-t-elle?”, in A. de Pury, Th. Römer and J.-D. Macchi (eds.), *Israël construit son histoire. L’historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (*Le Monde de la Bible*, 34; Ginebra: Labor et Fides, 1996), pp. 409-418, here p. 410; see also M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Century*, (SBLMS, 19; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1974), pp. 42-61; Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia*, pp. 378-380. On the biblical “covenant” in a Near Eastern environment, cf. D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, (*AnBib*, 21; Roma: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); P. Kalluveetil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, (*AnBib*, 88; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1982). On the consequences of Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian military campaigns and conquests in Syria-Palestine, cf. Thompson, *Early History*, pp. 339-351. For textual documentation, cf. J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) = *ANET*, pp. 274-317.

these relations could also have been reflected in cultural (religious) traditions as a means (perhaps the only means) for understanding reality.

On the archaeological ground, the record allows for an interpretation aiming at proposing a possible “archaeology of patronage”⁷¹—although one must also realize that the ambiguity of the material can present us problems analogous to that of telling a “chiefdom society” from a “secondary-state formation” in the archaeological record. However, dealing with such theoretical problems is a far better situation than having to decide where in the archaeology of Palestine Israel stops being a tribal society to become necessarily and gradually a full-blown state. As I said, this evolutionary scheme—so legitimizing of the biblical progression from Saul to David to Solomon—blurs considerably our historical attention from quite different developments that could have been active in Iron Age Palestine.

From the point of view of a critical historical methodology, the use of anthropological analogies from the contemporary Middle East ethnographic record can be of much assistance in having an idea of how Palestine’s (not the Bible’s) Israel and Judah as societies worked.

*The Rise of the House of Omri*⁷²

So far, I have presented a critique on the use of anthropological theory and also a revaluation of the archaeological record that apparently supports the existence of a biblical state of Israel (and Judah). Having all this in mind, one can offer some explanatory alternatives to current approaches on the theme to answer how the House of Omri appeared. We have seen that there is no firm ground for any Davidic or Solomonic empire during the 10th century BCE. On the other hand—and following Finkelstein—, there is plenty of evidence for arguing that social complexity in the Palestinian highlands rose only during the 9th century BCE. Since I am not an archaeologist, I shall not refer here to the high/low chronology debate.⁷³ I will only say that, from a historical point of view, Finkelstein’s low chronological dating seems to make more

71. “The presence of regional patrons may be evidenced from the distribution of clusters of villages in the central Galilean highlands” (Lemche, “From Patronage Society”, p. 118; cf. also pp. 115-117).

72. The following hypothesis has originally been proposed in E. Pfoh, “Salomón ben David y Egipto: Intercambios y el surgimiento de organizaciones sociopolíticas en Palestina durante la Edad del Hierro II”, in A. Daneri Rodrigo and M. Campagno (eds.), *Antiguos contactos. Relaciones de intercambio entre Egipto y sus periferias* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2004), pp. 133-160, esp. 144-154; idem, “De patrones y clientes”, pp. 66-69.

73. For I. Finkelstein’s stand, see his “The Archaeology of the United Monarchy: An Alternative View”, *Levant* 28 (1996), pp. 177-187; idem, “Bible Archaeology or Archaeology of Palestine in the Iron Age? A Rejoinder”, *Levant* 30 (1998), pp. 167-174. For responses to the “low chronology”: A. Mazar, “Iron Age Chronology: A Reply to I. Finkelstein”, *Levant* 29 (1997), pp. 155-165; Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know*, pp. 124-157; idem, “Histories and Non-Histories”, pp. 71-76, among others.

sense in the interpretation of both epigraphic and archaeological remains from the 9th century BCE on.⁷⁴

An interesting way for understanding the rise of the House of Omri in Palestine could be the *peer polity interaction* model, proposed by Colin Renfrew. According to this noted British archaeologist:

Peer polity interaction designates the full range of interchanges taking place (including imitation and emulation, competition, warfare, and the exchange of material goods and of information) between autonomous (i.e. self-governing and in that sense politically independent) socio-political units which are situated beside or close to each other within a single geographical region, or in some cases more widely.⁷⁵

This theoretical situation may be found in practice during early 1st millennium Palestine when, on one hand, many of the petty polities in the highlands and the lowlands became increasingly centralized—as it has been already noted *supra*—, and on the other hand, the appearance of Arabian long-distance trade⁷⁶ would have offered a main reason for competition and control between the petty polities, which were placed along the main trading routes. As Holladay indicates:

Hazor dominates broad stretches of agricultural land in the Huleh Basin, and controls the trade routes to Syria. Megiddo dominates the Esdraelon Valley and the southern overland routes to Tyre from a position controlling the major southwest-northeast pass through the Carmel range. Gezer dominates the northern part of the Shepelah and Philistine Plain, the coastal overland transit route, and the approach to the central hill country and Jerusalem by way of the Aijalon and Upper and Lower Beth Horon. Lachish dominates the southern Shepelah and Philistine Plain, the southern portions of the coastal over-

74. Cf. Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, pp. 149-225, 340-344.

75. C. Renfrew, "Introduction: Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change", in C. Renfrew and J.F. Cherry (eds.), *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

76. Cf. I. Finkelstein, "Arabian Trade and Socio-Political Conditions in the Negev in the Twelfth-Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.", *JNES* 47 (1988), pp. 241-252; Knauf, "King Solomon's Copper Supply", pp. 50-51; Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah", p. 383. On the appearance of the Arabs in the Near East and exchanges, cf. M.C.A. MacDonald, "North Arabia in the First Millennium BCE", in J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1995), vol. II, pp. 1355-1369, esp. 1364-65. Knauf (*contra* Finkelstein) denies the existence of such an Arabian trade during the 10th century (p. 49); however, it is precisely during the 9th century that the possibilities of detecting an exchange network grow: "The Arabs are first mentioned by name in 853, when in the annals of the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser III record that a certain Gindibu, the Arab, with a thousand camels joined the coalition of twelve kings which confronted the Assyrians at the battle of Qarqar, in northern Syria. These leaders were probably united by their interest in the trade which passed through Syria from Arabia, Egypt, and Anatolia and which Assyrian expansion was disrupting" (MacDonald, p. 1364).

land transit route, and the southern approach to the central hill country and Jerusalem bay way of Hebron.⁷⁷

In the beginnings of the 9th century BCE the polity that we know as “Bît Khumri” took control of these regional centers along with their geopolitical disposition and established a kingdom centered in Samaria—which is our first evidence of historical Israel as a socio-political entity. It is interesting to note that is with Omri’s regional patronage that we have for the first time in Iron Age Palestine evidence of luxury items exchanges, such as the ivory artifacts found in Samaria’s palace.⁷⁸ Also, the tribute in gold that king Jehu sent to Shalmaneser III around 841 BCE⁷⁹ leads us to believe that this gold had been imported, probably from Egypt or Arabia. This data could be presented as evidence that trade was a main factor in the socio-political dynamics of early Iron Age Palestine, and the struggle for controlling trading routes—as well as the luxury items exchanged—may have been the cause that triggered the emergence of Omri’s kingdom following Renfrew’s theoretical model of *peer polity interaction*.

This hypothesis would be in full agreement with Lemche’s idea that the transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron I-II was indeed an historical development “from a patronage society to a patronage society”, with differences between both periods but having analogous socio-political structures. In other words, Liverani says something similar in his *Oltre la Bibbia*: “I piccoli re palestinesi, abituati ad un rapporto di sudditanza verso un signore straniero, non avvrano più altra entità superiore di riferimento se non le loro divinità, e riadatteranno tutta la fraseologia e l’iconografia e la cerimonialità contruite per esprimere il loro rapporto col Faraone, per esprimere ora il loro rapporto con la divinità cittadina o nazionale”.⁸⁰ Indeed these words add argument—although surely it never was Liverani’s intention—to the suggestion made above that behind the covenant theology might lay a divine patronage model. But now, how could such a “patronage system” have survived the general crisis that affected the Eastern Mediterranean in the 12th century BCE and destroyed the Late Bronze Age world? Once again, Lemche has referred to what social anthropologists of the Middle East call “reserve ideology”; that is, an ideological strategy that allows tribes in changing circumstances to adopt variant ways of social behavior, while keeping latent the older ones until the general conditions change again and make them necessary.⁸¹ This, in fact, would explain how it is possible for Late Bronze Pales-

77. Holladay, “The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah”, p. 372. Cf. also Thompson, *Early History*, pp. 331-332.

78. Cf. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, pp. 503-507.

79. See *ANET*, p. 280.

80. Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia*, p. 45. The analytical comparison between Amarna’s Shechem and Omri’s political disposition in Finkelstein and Na’aman (‘Shechem of the Amarna Period’) may well support this interpretation of Liverani’s words.

81. See Lemche, *Early Israel*, pp. 230-231; following P.C. Salzman, “Ideology and Change in the Middle Eastern Tribal Societies”, *Man* NS 13 (1978), pp. 618-637. As

tine's inhabitants to maintain a patronage behavior with its Egyptian overlords and that, after things went back to normality (now in Iron Age I), these relations could have reappeared later in the 9th century BCE and developed into a greater system (the House of Omri), favored by its control of the Arabian trade routes, until the Assyrian takeover of the region, when the Assyrian king became the "great patron" of Palestine and had for him the trade's control.

Israel and Judah appeared in Palestine not as the result of the split of the United Monarchy but through a long socioeconomic process related to the differences between a more agriculturalist north in the highlands and a more pastoralist south.⁸² However, Finkelstein suggests that the Northern kingdom played an important role in leading Judah to "full statehood"; further, he says there existed "a sheer dominance of the Northern Kingdom over the small client-state (or better, chiefdom) to its south".⁸³ I concur with Finkelstein's hypothesis, but instead of talking about "states" or "tribal states" we should better be talking about "chiefdoms".⁸⁴ But the important thing here is that Jerusalem will not reach a major city status until the end of the 8th century BCE, when luxury items, "public" buildings—that is, urban development—and some scribal activity can be detected without any doubt.⁸⁵ We also must link this development with the fall of Lachish as a regional trade center caused by the Assyrians around 701 BCE.⁸⁶ The Assyrians sponsored the north-south olive trade routes and so they prevented the regional centers of

Salzman says, "a tribal population might be faced with over historical time with alternating periods of presence/absence of external threat, and might respond with alternation of centralised/decentralised organisation. An ideological system which maintains the more formal and wide-ranging alternative form of organisation, would then be insuring availability of that form through times of inactivity and making possible its easy activation during the recurrence of conditions for which it is suitable" (p. 624). These societal variations concur well with the ebb and flow of Palestine's demography; see note 31 above.

82. Cf. I. Finkelstein, "The Great Transformation: The "Conquest" of the Highland Frontier and the Rise of the Territorial States", in Th.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), pp. 349-365.

83. Finkelstein, "The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah", p. 95.

84. *Contra* Dever's plea for an Israelite "tribal state" (*What Did the Biblical Writers Know*, p. 128); see *infra* note 89. Here Dever does not offer arguments for this, just a majority vote: "today nearly all archaeologists recognize a small-scale but authentic "state" in central Palestine in the mid-late 10th century". Authority by consensus (i.e. "nearly all archaeologists") does not refute logical arguments; another argument is required, otherwise we are not following scientific rules anymore.

85. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah*, *passim*; R. Reich and E. Shukron, "The Urban Development of Jerusalem in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.", in A.G. Vaughn and A.E. Killebrew (eds.), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (SBLSS, 18; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), pp. 209-218.

86. Cf. Thompson, *Early History*, pp. 292, 410-411; Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, pp. 243-246.

Palestine from developing their expanding ambitions, continuing the characteristic fragmentation of Palestine's polities.

One last thing to deal here with is the socio-political nature of the House of Omri. Some scholars have proposed—rightly—to see the emergence of the Iron Age II kingdoms as the expression of “secondary-state formation” phenomena, as we have already noted.⁸⁷ Although this is a very possible option, one could also think in the patronage characteristics of these kingdoms, which places them closer to “tribal” organizations than proper states. Accordingly, Lemche has proposed to see these kingdoms as *patronage states*.⁸⁸ I concur with Lemche's approach; however, I would say *patronage kingdoms* is a better label because the word “state” refers directly to the Weberian definition—already noted—where “statehood” is detected when the monopoly of power within society is performed by an elite.⁸⁹ For sure, this monopoly could not exist in a patronage society, even less if the Iron Age II kingdoms depended on patronage for running its internal affairs. In other words, this is a definition we can find when Knauf says that “Edom was never more than just such a “tribal state”, i.e., a state where a thin veneer of central administration hardly disguised the structure of a society that basically functioned on a level not penetrated by the state”.⁹⁰ So, if the word “state” does not fulfill our expectations when studying the epigraphic and archaeological remains of the Iron Age Levant, why keep on using it? This is not just a matter of semantics, it is a matter of having what we study properly defined for our better understanding of it. This is why I think the idea of “patronage societies” must be a main subject of debate when dealing with the Southern Levant socio-political structures and dynamics, along with the recent appraisal of

87. See Knauf, “The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation”; Joffe, “The Rise of Secondary States”. Also Price, “Secondary State Formation”.

88. Cf. N.P. Lemche, “Chronology and Archives—When Does the History of Israel and Judah Begin?”, in D.M. Gunn and P.M. McNutt (eds.), *“Imagining” Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, (JSOT 55, 359; Sheffield: SAP, 2002), pp. 264-276 (p. 264f).

89. Cf. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, “Sociological and Biblical Views”, pp. 83-89; also D.M. Master, “State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel”, *JNES* 60 (2001), pp. 117-131. I am well aware that Middle Eastern “tribal states” do not fall into one rigid typological category (cf. Tapper, “Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople”, pp. 64-70); yet, I would still consider Weber's “monopoly of coercion” as the best definition for distinguishing what is a state from what is not: “any state structure, being a centralized monopoly of power, runs counter to all kinds of segmentary tribal social organization insofar as a distinctiveness and a certain degree of autonomy are basic features of any tribe” (Tibi, “The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous”, p. 130).

90. Knauf, “The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation”, p. 52.

understanding these societies at a macro level under an also Weberian model of patrimonialism.⁹¹

Concluding Remarks

Archaeology is our main source for the history of ancient Palestine. However by itself it is meaningless; we need interpretive models for making a coherent picture of the past out of its remains. For many years the Bible was the main interpretive model through the harmonization of two different ways of past recollection (ours and that belonging to the ancient biblical writers). The last decades of archaeological and biblical research have shown that we need better ways of writing Palestine's history—and that of the petty kingdoms of Israel and Judah. I have tried to show how anthropology and the ethnographic record of the Middle East could help us in having a secular explanation for accounting the rise of Israel and Judah in Palestine. I am also convinced that archaeology and anthropology should be kept apart from the Bible's stories of Israel when researching for history-writing goals—any comparison between both discourses could be made only at a final stage of research, but never aiming at harmonization or corroboration.

Leaving the Bible aside from our historical interpretation presents us with pasts often ignored by scholars. For instance, the fact that the names of Omri and Ahab may well be Arabic has been noted many years ago by M. Noth,⁹² and perhaps a connection between this fact and the Arabian caravan traders could be made; that Omri was a mercenary in service of the Israelite king is something suggested already by Noth but that cannot be proven. However, the hypothesis remains most interesting—and no less ironic. But there is no reason for our souls to be disturbed, should this happen to be proven so in the years to come. The Bible has “hidden” many of Palestine's historical details because such a modern recollection of human past, i.e. “history”, has little to do with its authors' intention.⁹³ Accordingly, one can discover these “hidden” details through a critical examination of primary data, as G. Garbini has recently shown us, bringing to our historical attention the existence of an Ammonite king called Hananel who ruled Judah in the 7th century BCE but which is unknown—or in disguise—in the books of Kings and Chronicles.⁹⁴

91. Cf. Master, “State Formation Theory”, pp. 128-131; Schloen, *The House of the Father*. Both studies have a direct antecedent in L.E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel”, *BASOR* 260 (1985), pp. 1-35.

92. M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen in Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1928), p. 63; and recently remembered for us by Lemche in his *The Israelites*, p. 182 n. 35.

93. Cf. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel, passim*; also Th.L. Thompson, “Hidden Histories and the Problem of Ethnicity in Palestine”, in M. Prior (ed.), *Western Scholarship and the History of Palestine* (London: Melisende, 1998), pp. 23-39.

94. See G. Garbini, “Biblical Philology and North-West Semitic Epigraphy: How Do They Contribute to Israelite History Writing”, in M. Liverani (ed.), *Recenti Tendenze nella Ricostruzione della Storia Antica d'Israele* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2005), pp. 121-135, esp. 125-128.

From a logical point of view, the attempt to prove historically true the Bible's mythic narrative through scientific models is as absurd as to verify the veracity of poetry in a laboratory. It simply misses the point of the original intention in both attempts because of the mixing of logical categories. I believe that only once this fundamental distinction is acknowledged and adopted widely by Bible students, archaeologists and historians, we may have not only a coherent history of the petty kingdoms of Israel and Judah in greater Palestine but also a clearer picture of the development of Judaism during the second half of the 1st millennium BCE, and a proper understanding of the significance of the Old Testament narratives for the peoples that created them in that period—Galileans, Samaritans, Idumeans, “diasporic” Jews, etc.—⁹⁵ narratives built upon older traditions whose original historical contexts cannot be retrieved for us, and which accordingly cannot be used uncritically and as direct evidence for writing history.

95. See Lemche, “The Old Testament—A Hellenistic Book?”; also Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”*; Thompson, *The Bible in History*, *passim*; Hjelm, “Whose Bible Is It Anyway?”; idem, *Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty: Zion and Gerizim in Competition* (CIS, 14; London: T & T Clark, 2004).