2
SETTLER COLONIALISM IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

Pekka Pitkänen

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you – the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you – 2 and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons.

(Deuteronomy 7:1–3, NRSV)

By the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 BCE), the ancient Near East (roughly today’s Middle East) could already boast of a long tradition of civilization and more than 1,500 years of writing. The world of the late Bronze Age was an era of internationalism, attested by commerce and international diplomacy.1 Major powers included Egypt, Assyria, Hatti (ancient Anatolia) and Mycena (ancient Greece). This era of internationalism came to an abrupt end around 1200 BCE.2 The causes of the collapse are still disputed, but it is well known that it was accompanied by migrations of peoples and a birth of a number of new political entities in the area. Migrations include the Arameans, who spread across large areas of the ancient Near East and established a number of independent kingdoms across the area covered by northern Iraq and Syria today between ca. 1200–900 BCE.3 Another migration involved the so-called sea peoples, who migrated from Mycena and Anatolia into the coastal areas of the western Levant. Many of these kingdoms were transitory, but one of the sea peoples, the Philistines, were established in the southwestern Levantine area.4 After the collapse of the Hittite kingdom, a number of so-called neo-Hittite kingdoms arose in parts of northern Syria and southeast Anatolia. Egypt and Assyria continued as unbroken entities through the period, even if Egypt entered its third intermediate period in the eleventh century BCE and Assyrian power receded towards the end of the Middle Assyrian period. In the southern Levant, a new entity called Israel arose during the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition.5 In the process, indigenous societies in the land were replaced by an Israelite polity that was initially tribal but was formed into a kingdom around 1000 BCE that divided into two soon after the initial unification. The divided kingdoms themselves were conquered and destroyed by the Assyrians and the Babylonians in the eighth and sixth centuries BCE.
The birth of ancient Israel can thus be set against large-scale changes in the area from ca. 1200–900 BCE. Due to the dearth of contemporary written sources from the period, historians must consult biblical texts, especially the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, Ruth and the beginning of the books of Kings, which purport to describe history in ancient Israel in the time between 1300 and 1000 BCE. With a few very limited exceptions, these texts are the only written sources from the area that relate to the period in question. However, the texts are different from modern historiography in that they consist of a unique mixture of historical, mythological, cultic and legal materials. The texts therefore should be read appropriately in terms of their genres and their unique combination. In addition, they naturally include only a limited amount of material and have been written from the perspective of the ancient Israelites. These texts in their present form are not contemporaneous to the events but are available in manuscripts that date from some 1,000 years or even more after the events portrayed in them. Through the transmission of manuscripts, they also found their way into ancient Judaism and then Christianity and on to the present. Otherwise, excavations from the ancient Near East since the late nineteenth century have produced considerable amounts of archaeological evidence from the area of ancient Israel that can be used in support of historical reconstruction. This notwithstanding, the evidence is ultimately limited and also contested, and any reconstructions can only suggest plausibilities rather than certainties. Constructing a detailed chronology for early Israel is particularly challenging. Instead, one may concentrate on elucidating broad developments and ideological accompaniments that pertain to specific periods. A better footing in chronological terms can only be achieved from ca. 1000 BCE on, when kingship appears in Israel.

The settler colonial invasion of ancient Israel

The books from Genesis to Joshua are particularly interesting for the study of settler colonialism in ancient Israel. Keeping in mind that both religious and nonreligious aspects were tightly integrated in the lives and ideologies of ancient Near Eastern peoples, Genesis starts from the creation of the world. The origins not only of culture but also of humans are discussed. Then, after a cataclysmic flood, Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, tells a man called Abraham who lives in Mesopotamia to migrate to the land of Canaan and promises this land to him and his descendants. A famine causes Abraham’s descendants to move to Egypt, and in the course of time they become slaves to the Egyptians. Yahweh, however, appears to Moses in a revelation and tells him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Helped with plagues that Yahweh sends on Egypt, the Israelites leave Egypt and congregate at Mount Horeb, where Yahweh appears to them and gives them laws that are to act as a foundation of their new society that is to be established in the land of Canaan, which Yahweh had already promised to their forefather Abraham. Departing from the mountain, the people traverse through the desert of Sinai towards Canaan, encountering some difficulties along the way. The book of Deuteronomy ends with Moses making a final sermon in the land of Moab at the edge of the promised land, providing further laws for the Israelites to keep in the new land. The book of Joshua continues the story and describes how the Israelites conquer and settle the land after the death of Moses, essentially fulfilling the divine promises.

This is colonising migration and settler colonialism. The Israelites, having left Egypt and entered the land of Canaan, were part of an autonomous collective that claimed both a special sovereign charge and a regenerative capacity. Also, they vied for a piece of land to claim for themselves under their sovereign charge, where they would establish a new society. According to ancient Israelite thinking, the indigenous peoples were to be eliminated. This was to be achieved either by killing them or by physical displacement (see esp. Dt 7; Ex 23:23–31). But
the documents indicate that there were also more subtle ways to destroy the indigenous societies. Indigenous people could be assimilated. Such people included Rahab (Josh 2, 6) and the Gibeonites (Josh 9). People coming from outside could also join the settler collective. Such people included the mixed multitude (erev rav) that went out of Egypt in the Exodus (according to Ex 12:38) and Caleb the Kenizzite (Josh 14:6). And the Israelites legislated for a foreigner (ger) in a number of places in the Pentateuchal legal materials (e.g. Lev 17–25; Dt 14:1–21). These people were then transferred into the settler collective, whether initially as indigenous or exogenous others. There could also be abject others, those permanently excluded from the settler polity, having lost their indigenous or exogenous status. In the Israelite society, according to the biblical texts, these included people who had been subject to the karat punishment of being cut off from the people (Lev 7:20–27; 17:4–14; 18:29 etc.) and the Ammonites and Moabites who could not be uplifted into the Israelite community, even when an Edomite and Egyptian could be included in the third generation (see Dt 23:1–7). These processes went on for centuries in the Israelite society after the initial invasion reflected in Joshua and resulted in transforming the Late Bronze societies into the later Iron Age and, ultimately, also the postexilic Israelite societies.

The Israelite documents attest a variety of intertwined ideological and practical features that accompany the overall settler colonial process. The travels of Abraham, the first forefather of Israel, according to the biblical documents, in the land of Canaan and building of altars there can be seen as staking a legal claim to the land (see Gen 12:1–9; 13:14–17). This ideological aspect holds true regardless of whether he, or the other biblical patriarchs, is an actual or a purely eponymous figure. Interestingly, the place for the first recorded altar is Shechem, and the Israelites are later instructed to build an altar on mount Ebal in Dt 27, and the act of building, together with the accompanying ceremony prescribed by Dt 27:9–26, is described as having taken place in Josh 8:30–35. This event is portrayed to have taken place at the initial stages of the conquest, even if the biblical text itself merely gives a temporal marker of ‘then’, ‘at that time’ (az) for the event (Josh 8:30). This ceremony of conquest and supplanting by a new society harks back to the patriarchal promises in Genesis and also reinforces the interrelatedness of Genesis, Deuteronomy and Joshua, and arguably Genesis–Joshua as a whole.

Abraham’s travels (Gen 12ff) can also be seen as part of ‘knowing the land’ and thus asserting a claim over it, even if the matter only remains at a level of a promise to the patriarchs themselves. The promises begin to be fulfilled several centuries later in the books of Numbers and Joshua. According to Num 13:1, Yahweh commands Moses to send out men to explore the land of Canaan. The men do this and bring back a description of the land. The book of Joshua then describes the successful conquest. Joshua 18:3–10 describes a mapping process as part of dividing the land to the Israelite tribes. This mapping process is part of Josh 13–21 that in a larger sense describe the tribal allotments. These allotments could be entirely programmatic. While such a programmatic vision could have arisen at any time in Israel’s history, based on comparative parallels from conquests in world history, the vision would fit particularly well in a period of early Israel when these territories were not yet (fully) in the control of the Israelites but were desired to be so, also keeping in mind that Josh 13–21 (esp. Josh 13:1–7) and other biblical documents (e.g. Judg 1) and archaeological evidence indicate that the Israelite settlement and control started from central, eastern and northern highlands and expanded out from there to include lowlands in the later course of Israel’s history (cf. also Judg 1).

It appears that there are, according to the biblical documents, some occasions when the conquering and settling Israelites rename places. This is the case with Gilgal (Josh 14:15), Hill of Foreskins (Josh 5:2–3), Valley of Achor (Josh 7:26), Hebron (Josh 14:15; 15:13; Judg 1:10), Debir (Josh 15:15), Jerusalem (Judg 19:10), Bethel (Judg 1:23), Dan (Josh 19:47; Judg 18:29), Havvoth Jair (Num 32:31) and Nobah (Num 32:42). By way of comparison and contrast, interestingly, in
Pekka Pitkänen

the explicitly religious sphere, the Israelites are commanded to erase even the name of the gods of the previous inhabitants (Dt 12:3). Instead, the name of Yahweh is to be established in the land and in a ‘chosen place’ in particular (Dt 12:4–31).

As regards foundation stories that new societies often use to legitimate their presence, clearly the Bible indicates, in the book of Genesis in particular, that the land was promised to the patriarchs, and this theme runs through the whole of Genesis–Joshua one way or another (see e.g. Ex 3:16–17; 4:5; Dt 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; cf. e.g. Num 13:2; Josh 1:2, 12). The exodus and liberation provide another powerful foundation story, and the occasions of lawgiving at Sinai (Ex), in the wilderness (Leviticus–Numbers) and at the edge of the promised land (Deuteronomy) add further strands to the set of foundation stories. The genealogies (see especially Gen 10) serve to establish Israel’s place among the nations, in the context of creation and the land Israel now occupies, and the patriarchal stories define Israel’s relations with its close neighbours (e.g. the Edomites, Gen 26–27, 32–33).

As for supplanting ‘the savages’ and the genocidal imperative that typically accompanies settler colonial processes, the idea of the lower worth of the inhabitants is already grounded in Gen 9:25–27 where Canaan, the eponymous forefather of the Canaanites, is cursed. In a manner typical of the narratives of Genesis, Canaan’s father Ham happens to behave in a bad manner when his father Noah, the sole survivor of the cataclysmic flood, gets drunk. Noah then curses Ham, but blesses his other sons, Shem and Japhet, of whom the former is an eponymous distant ancestor of the Israelites. As already discussed, such texts as Dt 7, ostensibly pertaining to the later time when the conquest took place, indicate that the inhabitants of Canaan are to be obliterated. This settler colonial transfer corresponds to a genocidal imperative.

According to the biblical documents, lands could also belong to the Israelites by right of conquest. An example of this is the lands of the kings Sihon and Og (see e.g. Num 21:21–35; Dt 2:24–3:11). These kings ruled in the area east of the River Jordan that was not as explicitly part of the promised land as was land west of the Jordan. The biblical materials present the engagement in battle by the Israelites with them as a result of the aggression of those kings, thereby legitimating the Israelite conquest (see Num 21:21–23). This said, it is also true that such conquest and dispossession had to be sanctioned by Yahweh (see Dt 2:24–25). Yahweh did not allow the Israelites to conquer the Edomites even when they refused Israel passage through their lands (see Num 20:14–21; Dt 2:2–9). This was because the Edomites were seen as closely related to the Israelites, as expressed through the narratives in Genesis (see Gen 25–27; 32–33). Lands might apparently belong to the Israelites even by virtue of treading on them (see e.g. Josh 1:3; 14:9), even if this again, in the minds of the ancient Israelites, ultimately stemmed from the divine will of Yahweh that had already been largely predetermined. In this context, it would seem that ancient battles already provided legitimation for Jacob, according to Gen 48:22. All in all, divine will and familial relationships played a significant part in the ancient Israelite worldview from which legitimate and potentially illegitimate actions could follow.

With early Israel, in terms of developing its new land and populating it, we can see how the population explosion, as it has been called, in the highlands was followed by an expansion out from there in the ensuing centuries. In general, settler colonial processes may include periods of apparently peaceful coexistence, then extensions of the process that may include further fighting and may also include transfers by assimilating indigenous peoples. While the Israelite narrative in the book of Joshua can be read to emphasise aspects of war and sudden conquest, it does also indicate a continuing settlement process that took a lot of time. Conversely, the narrative of Judges does emphasise the gradual settlement and coexistence aspect, without, however, denying that there was also violence (esp. Judg 1). Again, importantly, archaeological evidence attests a settlement process in the highlands. It also on the whole indicates a basic highland culture that
Ancient Israel

expands towards the lowlands between the twelfth and tenth centuries. It thus does support the idea of a settler colonial process, even when it is generally not easy to verify individual conquests described in the Bible.

While it is typical for societies, including new societies, to fortify their territory, with early Israel, there seems to be a relative lack of mention of fortifications and fortifying in Genesis–Joshua. But Num 32 does indicate that the Israelites fortified and possessed fortified towns in Transjordan, and Dt 3:5 suggests fortified towns with ‘many’ unfortified villages in Transjordan, which would also fit with the large number of unfortified settlements in the Cisjordanian highlands in Iron Age I. It would appear that the Israelites would have taken over fortified towns where they existed and where they could conquer them (cf. Josh 10:20; 14:12; 1 Sam 6:18, 20; 6, 15). David and Solomon and later kings are described as taking over fortified towns or fortifying themselves (e.g. 2 Sam 5:6–10; 1 Ki 9:15; 1 Ki 12:25). The fact that one had to labour to reach the highlands from the coasts may in itself already have helped to form a naturally defendable border for the early Israelite settlers, even if such a border would be somewhat vague and ultimately quite porous, if a sufficient effort would be exercised by a potential conqueror.

The legal materials in Genesis–Joshua can be seen as providing a blueprint for the new Israelite society, even when it is not certain how much this was a theoretical rather than a practical construct, in line with legal materials in the ancient Near East. These materials include two main differing strands of tradition. The priestly tradition (Exodus–Numbers) pertains to ritual and cultic materials largely targeted for priests but also includes injunctions for life in the land as a community (esp. the so-called Holiness Code in Lev 17–26). The tradition in Deuteronomy, with precursors in Ex 20–23 and 34, is also of priestly origin but has been targeted at lay people. Land is clearly a leitmotif in Deuteronomy. The legal materials have been placed in a framework of two covenants, one at Sinai (Ex 20—Lev 26, with additions in Exodus and Numbers) and one at Moab (Dt 5–28), forming a complex and unique hermeneutical entity. The legal materials are nevertheless based on an already well-established ancient Near Eastern tradition that demonstrably dates back to the third millennium BCE. As was already noted, the legal materials both establish a new community and stipulate the removal of the native societies, with the land at their centre.

Reconstructing the ethnic and political mix before the arrival of the Israelites is not easy. There are two main sources for such an endeavour. The first is the Amarna letters, which are a set of interregional diplomatic correspondence between the pharaoh of Egypt and a set of ancient Near Eastern political entities. The letters date from the fourteenth century BCE, and a number of them are sent to or by Canaanite rulers which also were vassals to Egypt at the time. What the texts reveal is that Canaan was at the time divided into small political entities, and this picture is confirmed by the biblical texts, the second main source for reconstructing the pre-Israelite era. The Israelites referred to the indigenous nations as ‘seven nations’ (e.g. in Dt 7:1). This designation is formulaic and can be compared to the so-called nine bows as traditional foes of Egypt in ancient Egyptian documents. On the whole, the Israelites were not modern ethnographers in terms of their interest in preserving full details about the indigenous peoples, and therefore the designation is likely to give us a representative picture at best.

The relatively small area where ancient Israel was based had a varying environment with a set of differing microclimates and thus was conducive to a number of political organisations. It would appear that Genesis–Joshua, with its emphasis on the unity of the various tribes across this geographical area, was designed to help towards forging a cultural and political unity in the land and foster an ethnogenesis. The tribes were seen as originating from common forefathers, according to Genesis. They were imagined to have been tightly camped around a central sanctuary in the wilderness on their way from Egypt (Num 2–4) and were then seen as having dispersed into the land (Josh 13–21). It would appear
that the authors of Genesis–Joshua played on traditions stemming from the putative Moses group and reworked them further into an all-encompassing scheme in order to include all geographical regions that they envisaged as the territory of emerging Israel. Interestingly, the Deuteronomic vision of the Israelite society in particular also attests relative democratic features. And archaeological evidence from the highlands attests a relatively homogenous set of dwellings, speaking for a lack of stratification. Stratification was to come after the onset of monarchy in the late eleventh–early tenth century.

Ancient Israel as a settler colonial society

The biblical documents present a vision of a ‘rest’ that Israel achieved in the land that Yahweh promised to their forefathers. This is accompanied with Yahweh dwelling in the midst of the people. The vision was seen to come to fruition at the end of the book of Joshua. Divine presence was considered vital in the ancient Near East for the benefit and well-being of people, and its absence could lead to disaster and destruction. The narrative of Genesis–Joshua starts with the creation of the world and the placement of the first man in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2). God himself is present there with Adam. After the fall and expulsion from the garden, man was in many ways left alone in this respect. With ancient Israel, at Sinai, with the making of the covenant (Ex 19ff), Yahweh establishes his presence with Israel through the ark of the covenant and the tent of meeting (Ex 25–40). The tent of meeting was equivalent to an ancient Near Eastern temple, where gods were present with the people and the ark was a specific artefact where Yahweh’s presence was manifested. The tent of meeting was then set up at Shiloh as part of a successful completion of the conquest (Josh 18:1), restoring paradise through god’s presence in the new land (cf. Josh 21:43–45). In this, importantly, in Israel, there was to be only one place where Israel’s god dwelt (Dt 12; and in the wilderness camp in Lev 17), in contrast to most other ancient Near Eastern societies, which typically had multiple temples at multiple locations. A main issue is that the narrative attests the desire of settler societies to imagine an idyllic new society, even when this is likely to not quite correspond to an actual state of affairs (e.g. Josh 13:1–7). Genesis–Joshua thus has to do with production, legitimation and potential actualisation of this idyllic imagery.

After the initial settlement, which is usually dated to the thirteenth–twelfth centuries BCE, the Israelite society consisted of a number of continually settling tribes that operated without a political or administrative centre, even if Shiloh, at roughly the centre of the land, came to exert a centralising religious claim (see Josh 18:1–2; 22:9–34). For the first 150–200 years, the various Israelite tribes also experienced various vicissitudes and conflicts with their neighbouring peoples. The book of Judges, which describes the period, lacks a firm chronology, but we can see from it that the tribes often acted independently from each other, even if there was also sometimes at least partially united action (see Judg 4–5). Towards the end of this period, in the late eleventh century BCE, the mood amongst the tribes started to gravitate towards kingship. The biblical materials describe how the Israelites felt that they should have a king like other surrounding nations who would also help lead them collectively in battles against threatening neighbours (see esp. 1 Sam 8), amongst whom the Philistines were particularly prominent. The first king, Saul, could not establish a permanent dynasty. His place was taken by David, who then established a hereditary monarchy in Israel (see esp. 2 Sam 7). His son Solomon further consolidated the political and religious situation (see 1 Ki 11–10). In terms of settler colonialism, idealised imagery is repeated in the depiction of the time of Solomon, in 1 Ki 4:20–34 and apparently 1 Ki 10. At the same time, this contrasts with 1 Ki 11, where a cognitive dissonance appears to take place. But, all in all, it would seem that the narrative of Kings sees another high point associated with Solomon. This is attested by the choice of Jerusalem and the building of the temple there after the rejection
Ancient Israel

of Shiloh (and the tent of meeting) in mid-eleventh century BCE and the wider conquests of especially David and the then-resulting peace under Solomon (cf. Ps 78:54–72). The description of the time of Solomon even fits with a second settler colonial peak in the territory of Israel itself through the enslavement of the remnants of the nations by Solomon (see 1 Ki 9:20–21), even if the cognitive dissonance is now primarily Solomon’s idolatry. That said, except for the idolatry, the nondestruction of the indigenous elements may also have been seen as more or less problematic in the mind of the author(s) of the narrative. The portrayal of the treatment of the natives at this time would also seem to fit with an apparent tendency of settler colonial societies to particularly focus on assimilation after main territorial conquests have been completed.38

In sum, we can see that the overall ancient Israelite strategy and message attested in Genesis–Joshua and Judges, the thrust of events portrayed in them and the broad contours of archaeological data point towards a settler colonial transformation in ancient Canaan at the end of the second millennium BCE that continued well into the time of the monarchy as depicted in Samuel and the first chapters of Kings. It should be noted that, for example, importantly, this historical reconstruction does not intend to return to such conquest models that were proposed and were for a time prominent in the twentieth century.39 Instead, we are speaking in terms of an overall process that involved violent events together with other more peaceful processes, with the mapping of their presentation with the biblical materials not necessarily being straightforward, especially in Genesis–Joshua.40 As part of such mapping, one should consider the narratives as a mixture of fact and fiction. The biblical authors told what in their view might plausibly have happened. Many of the stories were thus told in an embellished manner.41 However, one may think that there is a kernel of truth in the materials. Even though Gen 1–11, which includes a description of the creation of the world, should be seen as mythical protohistory, and even though there is no direct evidence even for the existence of the patriarchs and no direct evidence about the Exodus from Egypt, we do know that there were Semites in Egypt in the Middle Bronze Age, and some of them rose to high positions in the Egyptian society. After the expulsion of the Hyksos at about the end of the Middle Bronze Age, it is possible that the societal position of Asiatics would have deteriorated as a whole, with some possibly ending up in a position of slavery. It is then, for example, possible that a Semite did actually wander in the Sinai area and felt an experience of the divine and a political consciousness to help an enslaved group of his compatriots leave Egypt. Others could also have followed in such a migration, even at least partially separately from this group. The people spent some time in the wilderness, perhaps passing through the place where the leader had experienced his divine call. The group experienced some hardship and diseases in their harsh desert environment and was initially afraid to attempt a conquest of the land, but eventually had the courage to do so and also succeeded in making a bridgehead that expanded in the following centuries.

In the wider context, as already implied earlier, there are indications that ancient Israel was only one of several settler societies at the time in its own immediate surroundings and even in the wider Near East. The migrations of the Philistines and the Arameans in the late second millennium BCE are explicitly referred to in the Bible itself (see Amos 9:7; Dt 2:23), and extrabiblical evidence also supports a settler colonial related interpretation.42 In addition to these peoples, according to the biblical materials, the Moabites, Edomites and Ammonites had also settled in and displaced previous inhabitants of their respective areas by the time the Israelites appeared on the scene (see Dt 2:8b–12, 16–22).

Thus, the emergence of ancient Israel, together with other political entities in the area after the collapse of the Late Bronze international era in the late second millennium BCE, can be considered to have been accompanied by migration and settler colonialism, and such processes continued into the first millennium, where they are also attested in other societies (see Graham
in this volume, but cf. also comments in the conclusion to this chapter). This reconstruction pushes the attestation of settler colonialism further back in time than previously suggested. And yet there are indications that such processes may have been in existence even earlier. Already the Uruk culture in the area of Susiana in the fourth millennium BCE may have been intrusive and a result of settler colonialism.43 If so, we are truly speaking of a human phenomenon that dates back to the earliest times.44

**Conclusion**

The united ancient Israelite kingdom set up by David and Solomon divided into two after the death of Solomon in the latter part of the tenth century (see 1 Ki 12). Since the ninth century BCE, the Israelites started to be under increasing pressure from external societies, with a tendency towards territorial losses. According to 2 Ki 10:32–33, Yahweh started to ‘reduce the size of Israel’ at that time. Both the Arameans (see ibid.) and the Moabites (cf. 2 Ki 1:1; 3:4–5) were specific culprits in this. Some of the Moabite incursion is recorded in the so-called Mesha stele unearthed from the ninth century BCE, according to which (lines 8–15):

(Now) Omri had occupied the land of Medeba, and (Israel) had dwelt there in his time, and half the time of his son (Ahab), forty years; but Chemosh dwelt there in my time. And I built Baal-meon, making a reservoir in it, and I built Qaryaten. Now the men of Gad had always dwelt in the land of Ateroth, and the king of Israel had built Ateroth for them; but I fought against the town and took it, and slew all the people of the town as satiation (intoxication) for Chemosh and Moab. And I brought back from there Arel (or Orel), its chieftain, dragging him before Chemosh in Kerioth; and I settled there the men of Sharon and men of Maharith.45

This indicates the existence of ‘reverse’ settler colonialism by the Moabites in the process of annexing Israelite territory. The Northern kingdom then fell to the Assyrians in the eighth century. The accompanying Assyrian population transfers changed the composition of the population (see 2 Ki 17). It was only the southern kingdom of Judah that survived the onslaught, with the famous siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib attested both in biblical (see 2 Ki 18–19; Isa 36–37) and Assyrian records (see Annals of Sennacherib, Col iii:18–31). While 1 Chr 4:38–43, which portrays the time of Hezekiah in the eighth century BCE, suggests that the Judahites of the Southern kingdom could still revert to settler colonial approaches at the time (in this case in the southern, largely semiarid part of the kingdom of Judah), towards the end of the monarchical period, at the time of Josiah in the late seventh century BCE, when the law code of Deuteronomy had been rediscovered, the focus of the Israelite society seems to have been more inwardly. Josiah’s famous Deuteronomic reforms seem to have been about the destruction of idolatry rather than a continuing settler colonial transformation and its associated genocidal imperative (see 2 Ki 22–24). Genesis–Joshua itself may at this time have been going through some changes in both its form and in how it was being understood.46 Importantly, a first version of the books of Kings may have been written in this period and connected with Genesis–Joshua, Judges and Samuel to form a first version of Genesis–Kings as a unified historical work, which would as a whole have a different focus than Genesis–Joshua on its own.

Once the Israelite monarchy had been extinguished by the Babylonian conquests at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, the interpretation of Genesis–Joshua, and already the books of Samuel–Kings, regardless of whether the first edition of the books of Kings originates from the exile to Babylonia or before it, would now focus on reflection on and interpretation of the documents
Ancient Israel

based on the great catastrophe.\(^47\) If there was a further exilic redaction of the materials, or in case of an exilic composition of Kings mutatis mutandis, it could then have added the final chapters of Kings and inserted or retouched at least some of the materials that are linked to the exile in their present form in Genesis–Joshua.\(^48\) It is also very possible that the exile acted as a(nother) major watershed in terms of how Genesis–Joshua per se was being read. As suggested by Sanders,\(^49\) the loss of immediate connection to the land for the exiles (who were in Babylonia) meant that the fulfilment of its conquest was now less important than before. Nor would the returnees under the Persians, who conquered the Babylonians as a small community within the Persian empire (see 2 Chr 36; Ezra, Nehemiah), be likely to have had the means to launch a settler colonial programme.\(^50\) Instead, the *torah* of Moses, a document that looked forward to the land, became a reference point for the now emerging early Judaism, securing the identity of the early Jews, many of whom were and even would increasingly be scattered throughout the Mediterranean world and, in practice, could only hope to return to the land someday, rather in an ‘eschatological’ sense.\(^51\) This identity did also have an increasingly individualising aspect.\(^52\) Accordingly, Ezra would read the Pentateuch as *torah* in postexilic times and Nehemiah would focus on separation from foreigners rather than their extermination. It is then very possible that, in terms of the canonical process for the emerging early Judaism, the separation of the Pentateuch from what follows took place during this era.\(^53\) After this development, it was largely only Joshua that was left on its own as an ostensible conquest text. In the Graeco-Roman environment, New Testament readings detached the document even more from its original message. Readings based on the original settler colonial vision came back in vogue in the Western colonial period in particular, although perhaps in a somewhat mutated form. They coexisted with more or less explicit religious readings that were increasingly put on the texts after the fall of the kingdom of Judah in the sixth century BCE. In this way, the texts pertaining to ancient Israelite settler colonialism survived, and even thrived, through the vicissitudes of history. Through this, they continued to influence religious and political communities and have left a significant and lasting legacy to the world, even when early Israel and the ancient Israelite kingdoms themselves completely vanished in the mist of history.

**Notes**

3. See later in the chapter for further details.
4. Ibid.
5. An entity called Israel is first attested in the so-called Merneptah stele, dated to ca. 1205 BCE.
6. Cf. G. Galil, A. Gilboa, A. M. Maier and D. Kahn (eds.) *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History*, AOAT 392, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012, p. ix, according to whom the history of the ancient Near East in the twelfth–tenth centuries BCE can currently still be considered to be “an unsolved riddle” as a whole.

9 It is not even clear when the Israelite settlement started. The biblical note in 1 Kings 6:1 points to the (late) fifteenth century BCE, but archaeological evidence suggests the thirteenth century BCE. As far as it is known, no annalistic records that could be used towards counting overall time were kept before the Israelite monarchy, and the biblical writer would therefore not need to be expected to have had a full sense of time that had passed before the monarchy.


11 It should be noted here also that the so-called Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26) and Deuteronomistic laws particularly focus on land.


14 I.e. it legitimates the conquest in the eyes of the conquerors themselves, and this legitimation could also serve as argumentation to be presented to the indigenous peoples and others. For much of the next few paragraphs in this section, cf. D. Day, Conquest: How Societies Overwhelm Others, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.


17 Such expressions of relations appear to go back to the Late Bronze Age in ancient Greek traditions; see M. Finkelberg, Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 24–41.


19 Day, Conquest, p. 96.

20 See Dever, Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?, p. 98.


23 On the difficulties with the relationship between text and archaeology in respect to the particularly difficult sites of Jericho, Ai and Arad, see e.g. P. M. A. Pitkänen, Joshua, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, Leicester: IVP, 2010, passim and R. K. Hawkins, How Israel Became a People, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, pp. 91–120 and passim.


Ancient Israel
to the book of Deuteronomy, comes through particularly interestingly and in considerable detail in C. Parker, Deuteronomy’s Place: A Philosophical Analysis of Place in Deuteronomy, PhD Thesis, University of Gloucestershire, 2015.


28 Cf. Mu-chou Poo, Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes Toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and China, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 21; Poo also (ibid., pp. 46–47) mentions that such 'lumping' took place in China and that 'The numbers nine, or eight, seven, six, for that matter, are obviously numerical metaphors for “many”'.


30 See e.g. Parker, Deuteronomy’s Place.

31 For eponymous ancestors in traditional sources, see Finkelberg, Greeks and Pre-Greeks, pp. 24–41.


33 See Dever, Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?


35 Cf. Veracini, Settler Colonialism, pp. 88–89.

36 Cf. note 9, above.


39 For a summary of these, see e.g. P. Pitkänen, Joshua, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, Leicester: IVP, 2010, pp. 29–31.

40 See Pitkänen, Joshua, for one possible way of reading the texts.

41 Cf. this with the range between fact and fiction in T. Longman, Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991, incl. 209–10; cf. also Kitchen and Lawrence, Treaty, Law and Covenant, Vol. 2, pp. 60–61 on the preservation of ‘reminiscences’ from earlier times in later stories about those times in Egypt and Greece. The large numbers in Genesis–Joshua (see e.g. Numbers 1) simply may be intentional exaggeration.


46 Cf. e.g. Carr, The Formation of the Hebrew Bible.
See esp. 2 Kings 25 for the conquest of Jerusalem and the fall and exile of the Southern kingdom.


