ETHNICITY AND ISRAELITE RELIGION:
THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOCIAL BOUNDARIES IN JUDGES

by

Donald Bruce MacKay

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Centre for the Study of Religion, in the University of Toronto

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0-612-27686-4
Abstract

Ethnicity and Israelite Religion:
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Doctor of Philosophy
1997

Donald Bruce MacKay
Centre for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

The purpose of this interdisciplinary work is to examine expressions of differentiation among groups of people named in the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges in order to determine if the narratives depict identity, segregation, and interaction among groups and their representatives in a manner which may be interpreted appropriately as “ethnic.” An anthropological model of ethnicity is proposed which recognizes the combination of two facets, one which emphasizes the essential, traditional, and primordial aspects of group identity and a second which creates, recreates, and accentuates differences and makes claims of ethnic uniqueness within the context of particular circumstances. The models and assumptions about ethnicity employed by a number of biblical historians with regard to the issue of Israelite identity are surveyed to demonstrate their lack of theoretical and epistemological
clarity regarding ethnicity. To illustrate the application of a theoretically clear model of ethnicity, the narratives of the "major" judges, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelek, Jephthah, and Samson, viewed in this study as compositions of the Deuteronomistic historian, are examined to interpret whether or not the stories depict the two facets of ethnicity described by the model. The purpose is not to write an ethnic history of early Israel, but to determine if the picture of relations in the stories of the major judges is consistent with the model of ethnicity.

The thesis of this work is that the stories of the major judges, as composed by the Deuteronomistic historian, do express both primordial and circumstantial aspects of ethnicity in describing relations among the various groups and individuals associated with the major judges. Group names, genealogical details, and religion are the primary features expressing differences in a priori primordial terms. Economic, political, and religious interactions are the main features describing differences dependent on particular circumstances. The conclusion is that groups are described in a manner consistent with the proposed model of ethnicity and that, as depicted in the narratives of Judges, ethnic identity is not entirely fixed or static but is also pictured being defined in response to changing conditions.
Acknowledgments

It gives great pleasure at the end of this long journey to acknowledge those who offered the assistance, advice, criticism, and encouragement that accompanied all of my steps along the way. First and foremost to the members of my dissertation committee, E. G. Clarke, Department of Near Eastern Studies; S. A. Nagata, Department of Anthropology; and E. B. Banning, Department of Anthropology, I give heartfelt thanks collectively and individually for providing thoughtful evaluation and helpful encouragement at every step. I also wish to thank Walter E. Aufrecht, University of Lethbridge, for unfailing support and encouragement over the many years since he gave the first push which started me off on this road. Thanks go as well to Robert J. Rogerson of the Department of Geography, University of Lethbridge, for support during the final stages of writing.

Of the fellow students, teachers, and scholars who have provided assistance and inspiration, I wish to single out Russell T. McCutcheon for hours of stimulating intellectual excitement and pleasure exploring ideas and their implications; D. Alan Aycock and Norman L. Buchignani for responding to my nascent struggles with ethnicity; Marvin A. Sweeney for penetrating criticisms of my early work on Judges; friends among the staff and volunteers at the Tel Miqne - Ekron Excavations for, over the past six seasons, providing an exciting environment in which to tentatively begin exploring some of the historical implications of this work; Bruce and Carolyn Routledge for empathy and companionship as we travelled along similar paths; Kevin McGeough for his insight; and to Ry Cooder and David Wilcox for emotional and spiritual support through good times and bad.
This work is the culmination of an investment which I would not have been able to make without the support of a number of institutions. I wish to thank the University of Toronto, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Doctoral Fellowship #452-90-1472), and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation for fellowships which enabled the completion of the research for this study. Special thanks go to S. Gitin and the staff of the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and the other Fellows of the 1993-1994 academic year for support while I held the Kress Fellowship.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents, Donald C. and Margaret J. MacKay and my sister M. Gillian MacKay, for support and encouragement through all the years of schooling and university education. Thanks in particular go to my father for instilling in me a work ethic and an appreciation for science which I seemed to have gained, appropriately, more by osmosis than by instruction. Special thanks go to Flora MacKay, my closest travelling companion, and to Elizabeth MacKay, who joined us part-way through the trip, for all the comfort, compassion, and sacrifices on this one long leg of our journey together.

D. Bruce MacKay
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INTRODUCTION
Introduction

Ethnic relations and ethnicity are prominent in the research agendas of many anthropologists and sociologists.\(^1\) And although there is spirited scholarly debate within these fields over the exact meaning of ethnicity and about the best theoretical approach to use in its study, the concept has not remained cloistered in esoteric academic halls. Ethnicity is a force which also attracts a sizable share of current public and media attention. Indeed, in recent years the reverberations from “ethnic” conflicts around the world have often propelled the concept to centre stage of humanity’s concerns in the late twentieth century (Tambiah 1989). Discussion of ethnicity has spilled over academic boundaries and has figured in the work of many other scholars, as well, not just anthropologists and sociologists. Furthermore, since many ethnic groups voice their claims to autonomy and express their identity in terms of religion (Banuazizi and Weiner 1986), ethnicity, ethnic relations, and ethnic identities should also be of interest to scholars of religion.

Ethnic groups, ethnic identity, ethnic relations, and ethnicity are concepts central to anthropological research on group identity and on the general tendency of human beings to separate themselves into groups (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995). The overarching question for social scientists concerns the motivation and justification for this segmenting of human populations. Are ethnic group identities expressed by group members as the result of *a priori*, inherent, and natural forces which impose separation and constrain the actions of the members of the group? Or are the motiva-

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1 The literature is vast but, for example, peruse any issue of the following journals for a representative range of studies: *Ethnicity, Ethnic Groups, The Journal of Ethnic Studies, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Ethnic Studies, Ethnology.*
tions for such divisions expressed by group members as arising from the choices and efforts of the participants themselves? Are ethnic groups, therefore, to be explained as natural and relatively static entities with roots deep within the human animal or are ethnic groups fluid and changeable categories, created and constructed by the group members themselves in response to changing circumstances? How do ethnic group members express their identity and what do their expressions reveal about the motivation and justification for their particular group's identity? What role does religion play in a group's definition and expression of its identity? Is religion a force which is also *a priori* and does it also constrain the actions of group members or cause divisions within humanity? Or is religion one factor among many in a group's expressions of its identity which is rationally constructed and created by the members of the group?

Apart from the merit these questions have in an academic sense, they also have implications for understanding humanity in general, for understanding relations between groups, and for understanding a group's expressions of its identity through its history, politics, culture, religion, and literature.² It is a small part of the larger and more general enterprise of the humanities and social sciences which have the aim of adding to our knowledge and understanding of humanity.

Scholars of ancient Near Eastern peoples and religions working from within the same general humanistic tradition also have used the concept of ethnicity in their studies. This is especially the case with regard to the Israelites. But perhaps it is not surprising, for, according to the epic traditions recounted in the Hebrew Bible,³ the

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² See any introductory anthropology textbook for an overview.

³ I am using *epic* here in the sense employed by F.M. Cross in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, as "the constitutive genre of Israel's religious experience," a form which "combines mythic and historical features in various ways and proportions" (1973:viii).
Israelites were a distinct group of people singled out by their God for special care and attention, a group with their own land, laws, family connections, and religious practices which set them apart from other populations in the ancient Near East. Studies of the Israelites have emphasized aspects ranging from history and material culture to literature and religion. But all of these studies have, to varying degrees, made the assumption that they are examining, for example, the history, material culture, literature, or religion of a particular, identifiable, and distinct group of people.⁴

Our understanding and knowledge about how a group identifies and describes itself or is identified and is described by others as a distinct group, however, requires a theory of group identity. If we use the concept, ethnicity, then we employ a theory, which may be implicit or explicit, of ethnic identity. And yet the epistemology of ethnic group identity, that upon which we base our claims for knowledge about the ethnic identity of groups, is by no means simple or self-evident. It is and has been the subject of classic as well as recent anthropological and sociological work.⁵

Unfortunately, much of the recent theoretical discussion about group identity and specifically about ethnic identity in the field of anthropology has not crossed disciplinary boundaries to enrich the assumptions made about or discussions of group identity and ethnicity by scholars of the ancient Near East. As a result of this lack of inter-

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⁴ This is evident even in the titles of some of these works. Note, for example, Who were the Israelites (Ahlström 1986), A History of Israel (Bright 1981), Early Israel (Coote 1990), In Search of 'Ancient Israel' (Davies 1992), The Tribes of Israel (De Geus 1976), The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement (Finkelstein 1988), The Formation of the State in Ancient Israel (Frick 1985), The Emergence of Israel in Canaan (Halpern 1983b), The Forging of Israel (McNutt 1990), A History of Ancient Israel and Judah (Miller and Hayes 1986), Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources (Thompson 1992).

⁵ See, for example, the classics of Durkheim (1915, 1964 <1933>) and Weber (1952). See Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995) for a recent overview on the place Durkheim's and Weber's work in the body of theory dealing with the construction of collective identity. We will examine in detail below specific theories of ethnicity.
disciplinary transmission, specialists in Israelite history, archaeology, literature, or religion have not been explicit about the theories of group identity which they employ implicitly to support their historical, archaeological, literary or religious inquiries. This lack of theoretical and epistemological clarity is the problem we wish to address in this work.

We will explore in the first chapter, therefore, theories of ethnicity and propose a model which we will apply to the stories of the major judges. Note, however, that in the heuristic framework of this study we will employ two sets of distinctions. One applies to our anthropological treatment and the other applies to our treatment of the biblical data. The first, which bears on our anthropological approach, is a distinction between the defining features of a given ethnic identity, what Barth (1969) called the “cultural stuff,” or content, of an ethnic group’s ethnicity, and the processes by which the members of a group actively define their own collective ethnic identity. In this study we are not concerned with the first element, that is, with defining and describing the historically specific particulars of the religion or cultural institutions of any one group such as, in this case, the traits and characteristics which typified an Israelite ethnic identity at any particular point in time. Rather, our focus is on the process, on how the groups depicted in a portion of the epic literature of the Hebrew Bible are portrayed.

The second distinction, which pertains to our use of the biblical data, recognizes that there is a difference between the historically specific culture to which the stories

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6 But, for a preliminary overview, see Cornell (1996) and the variety of approaches to these issues in, for example, any of the journals mentioned above (n.1), or any of the collected essays in Amit-Talai and Knowles (1996), Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman (1989), or Banuazizi and Weiner (1986).
may refer and the picture of culture which the stories themselves portray. Our concern in this work is not with the first facet, that is, with the cultural reality to which the stories refer, neither with the reality of the historical period which they may describe nor with the reality of the historical periods in which the stories were composed or compiled. In other words, our focus in this work is not on the history of the behaviour, culture, politics, economy, or religion of the Israelites per se. Rather, our focus is on an image of culture, in this case ethnicity, which is portrayed in the stories of the major judges. However, to illustrate the lack of theoretical and epistemological clarity, we will examine representative views on Israelite ethnicity in the third chapter of this work.

Our intent is to illustrate with the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges observations about the processes of ethnic identity, ethnic relations, and ethnicity that derive from our model of ethnicity. Analysis of the major judges stories in light of the model of ethnicity we propose will occupy the remainder of the work. The theoretical approach we take here raises questions such as the following: Is it legitimate to discuss the groups described in these stories as ethnic groups? Are the divisions between groups and their neighbours defined exclusively as a priori and natural? Or are the group identities described as resulting from the choices and decision-making processes of the characters in the stories? The anthropological question is, in the terms we will explain more fully below, are the divisions between groups pictured as being primordial or circumstantial?

Although any portion of Israel’s epic with sufficient descriptive detail could be examined as an illustration of the theoretical and epistemological focus we are taking

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7 On this distinction see Davies (1994) and Carter (1996).
in this study, we have chosen to focus on the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges. This portion of Israelite literature was selected for analysis because of the following reasons: First, the stories of the major judges, as we will see in detail below, depict the Israelites, Israelite sub-groups, or representatives of the Israelite people interacting with neighbouring groups, sub-groups, or their representatives. The texts' descriptions of interaction between groups provide appropriate materials for an anthropological analysis of ethnicity, ethnic relations, and ethnic identity according to the model we will outline below. Second, the major judge stories portray a variety of situational contexts or settings in which the interactions take place. The assortment of situations will be helpful for demonstrating the applicability of this particular model to a variety of cases. Third, although there is no unanimity among scholars on the date of the events described in the stories of the major judges, many scholars who discuss the nature and development of Israelite identity assume that the stories of the major judges do express ethnicity.\(^8\) The problem of where historically to locate the presumed picture of ethnicity obtained from the major judge stories, that is, to a time before the Israelites achieved nationhood under a king (as the stories appear to describe when taken at face value) or to a period after the loss of the northern kingdom's independence or to a time during or after the Babylonian exile, is a question that is beyond the scope of this study. Our aim, rather, is to examine the stories in the light of a clear model of ethnicity in order to produce a reading that has explicit theoretical support.

The point of this study, as we have said, is to produce an epistemologically clear and theoretically coherent reading of ethnicity in the major judge stories of the

\(^8\) See, for example, "community" as employed by Handy (1992:246) and Boling (1975:3), and our more detailed discussion below.
book of Judges. This is, in part, because the term “ethnicity” has figured prominently in many recent studies of ancient Israel but had not been treated adequately (see, for example, Skjeggestad 1992; Dever 1993; Mullen 1993; Schloen 1993; Thompson 1992). Although the word has been used liberally and interest in group identity has been central in many of these works, none of these scholars have developed an adequate model or stated clearly their understanding of ethnicity and ethnic relations. One of their preeminent concerns in these works has been with the characterization of Israelite distinctiveness: Are the Israelites to be understood as a race, a tribe, a chiefdom, a state or, indeed, a people truly separate from other peoples in the ancient Near East? Reaching an understanding of Israelite identity in these terms presupposes the problem of what anthropologists call “ethnicity” for it is concerned with issues of identity, differentiation between groups, and interaction between groups represented by different labels. The assumption in these works is that ethnicity is to be explained, at least partially, as a matter closely related to a group’s origins. This is, however, as we shall explore in greater detail below, a view that does not adequately take into account recent anthropological theory which indicates that ethnicity is a continuous process more than a static identity achieved by a group at a particular moment of origination.

Most scholars who have included the subject of Israelite ethnicity in their work have approached it explicitly or implicitly as a part of dealing with historical problems and, in particular, with the history of the emergence of Israel as a distinct group (see, for example, Ahlström 1986; Coote 1990; Coote and Whitelam 1987; Davies 1992; De Geus 1976; Finkelstein 1988; Gottwald 1979; Halpern 1983b; Thompson 1992 and our further discussion below). The primary method these scholars have used in their examination of the problem of origins is the historical-critical method, the
dominant non-theological approach to biblical studies in the twentieth century. The general presumption for those using this method who have been concerned with reconstructing history based on events portrayed in the Hebrew Bible is that the labels used in the text for various groups of people referred to actual groups of people which existed in historical reality. Most have used textual evidence, biblical and extra-biblical, as their primary data (see, for example, Ahlström 1986, 1993; Bright 1981; Coote 1990; Davies 1992; De Geus 1976; Gottwald 1979; Halpern 1983b; Thompson 1992). To varying degrees they have considered in addition the redactional history of the biblical text itself (see, for example, Miller 1976; Tov 1992) and the degree to which compositional processes evident in the creation of the text have affected its reliability and utility as an historical source (see, for example, Van Seters 1983). Others have approached the task of producing a history of the Israelites by taking archaeological evidence as their primary data (see recently, for example, Stager 1985; Coote and Whitelam 1987; Finkelstein 1988; 1991; Dever 1992).9

Early treatments of Israelite history in which scholars approached the question of the origin of the group’s identity and ethnicity used the Hebrew Bible’s names and labels for peoples to develop typologies, to define and catalogue key identifying traits for each group, and to describe the movements and interactions of these named groups (Albright 1935, 1939; Speiser 1933; Kenyon 1985; Alt 1966; Noth 1960). More recently, and especially following the ground-breaking work of Mendenhall (1962, 1973), Gottwald (1979), and Halpern (1983b), and based on a greater awareness of

9 Coote (1990) has argued that the debate between the textual and the archaeological approaches to Israelite history has resulted in a paradigm shift which has supplied a new consensus on approaches to the history of ancient Israel. Whitelam (1994) argues, on the other hand, that scholars are far from agreement and much work remains to be done to unify the textual and archaeological methods. An evaluation of this debate is beyond the scope of this work.
anthropological and sociological research, historians have worked less to construct typologies and to describe movements and interactions of different groups, and have aimed more to produce social histories which identify and understand processes of indigenous development (see, for example, Coote and Whitelam 1987; Coote 1990).

Recent approaches to the question of the origin of Israelite identity as a distinct and autonomous presence in the strip of fertile land between Egypt and Mesopotamia can be grouped, in general, under one of three theoretical headings which identify the scholar’s explanatory models for the appearance of the Israelites: conquest, immigration, or internal emergence or revolution.\(^\text{10}\) Implicit in these studies, as we will discuss in greater detail below, is the assumption that the group’s identity can best be explained through a history of the group’s origins. If we restate the problem in terms of ethnicity, the question is whether the Israelites arrived in the territory which eventually became their homeland from outside with a sense of identity already intact, either as conquerors or as immigrants, or whether they emerged autochthonously out of the ashes of the collapse of Late Bronze Age civilization and only gradually developed an identity distinct from that of their Near Eastern neighbours. While our concern in this study is not with the relative accuracy of the historical reconstructions advanced by the proponents of these positions, their works do illustrate that the concept, “ethnicity,” has been poorly understood and has been used without theoretical or epistemological clarity. We will examine in greater detail below, therefore, the approaches to ethnicity taken in these models.

Generally, two problems have characterized the use of ethnicity by studies treating the history of the emergence of a distinct Israelite identity that include references

\(^{10}\) We will examine these three approaches in greater detail below, but for preliminary bibliography see Gottwald (1979), Halpern (1983b), and Hess (1993).
to that identity in terms of ethnicity. The first is that scholars do not agree on the point in time when the identity of the group crystallized. This is an historical issue which deals with the question of how to date the events and action which epic biblical texts describe, as well as the question of how to date the different layers of composition and editing in the epic and the context in which these layers were written. These problems are beyond the scope of this thesis and so will not be treated critically here.

The second general problem is a much more fundamental issue, in our view, which concerns the epistemology of ethnicity and ethnic identity. We suggest, and will demonstrate below, that studies of the Israelites have used these concepts with little or no theoretical clarity or soundness. The lack of epistemological awareness has meant that they have appropriated what appear to be common-sense definitions and models of ethnicity and applied these to their data but without any critical awareness of the processes by which a group's identity is created, maintained, and expressed. This, in our view, is methodologically unsound.

Our argument on this point is similar to that of Collingwood's for history:

"The philosophy of history . . . means bringing to light the principles used in historical thinking, and criticizing them; its function is to criticize and regulate these principles, with the object of making history truer and historically better. . . . (This conception of philosophical inquiry as having a utility beyond itself, of assisting towards the development of something which is not itself philosophy, is a scandal to various people who, trying to keep the various interests of human life in watertight compartments, insist that philosophy serves no purpose except that of supplying academic answers to academic questions; but human life is not really divided into watertight compartments, and it is a very foolish method of combating utilitarianism to say that the things in which
utilitarianism sees *only* utility really possess *no* utility." (1994:346)

In this work, therefore, we will focus, as Collingwood suggests, on the epistemological issue because we feel that any approach to the problems of Israelite ethnic identity, historical, archaeological, literary, or otherwise, depends, at least in part, on how one identifies and treats ethnicity. Those who have used the concept, however, have skipped over this important point. Ethnicity has been used in their histories with little attention to anthropological theorizing on the subject and without any presentation of how these scholars determine what evidence in their data is indicative of ethnicity. Our aim in this work is to contribute in an interdisciplinary way to the filling of this gap between data and interpretation.

A brief survey of the range of opinions on the first problem is in order, however, even though our own concern is not with the history of the groups described in the stories of the major judges or with the history of the period in which the stories were created or with the history of the biblical texts which tell the relevant stories. There are two reasons for an examination of the dating issue. The first is that, although we are not focussing on the history of events described in the stories of the major judges, these stories were put into the form which we treat in our examination in a particular time period. Stipulating this period will help to clarify our approach to these texts. The second reason for this brief overview is that the positions taken by biblical historians with regard to the date of the textual data they use are often bound up with their views of ethnicity and of the formation and maintenance of ethnic group identity. In other words, and as we will examine in greater detail below, their epistemology of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic relations is related implicitly to the date they assign to the texts they use in their historical arguments and to their arguments about the origin of Israelite ethnicity.
The context for the debate about the dating of texts relevant to the question of Israelite identity, and in the context of the major judges particularly, is the discussion of the so-called Deuteronomistic History (Halpern 1983b:17-40). Martin Noth's (1981) seminal study on the composition of the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings, put forward the hypothesis that together these books were the work of a single author who wove together various source materials into a story of Israel and Judah written from the perspective of the theological principles expressed in the book of Deuteronomy in order to explain the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile as a failure to follow the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. In general, some scholars follow Noth in maintaining that the overall structure of the history is the work of a single author (Peckham 1993; Van Seters 1983). Another prominent model is that the Deuteronomistic History was produced in two editions, pre-exilic and exilic (Cross 1973; Nelson 1981; see Provan 1988 for an overview and critique). Scholars who take this position suggest that the first edition was written in support of the reforms of King Josiah in the 7th century B.C.E. while the second, exilic edition was composed in order to explain the Babylonian exile (see Weinfeld 1992; and the summary of Sweeney 1995).

A variety of themes and formulaic statements are garnered in support for the different positions taken by these authors. Note, for example, Provan's (1988) examination of מְדִינָת in the books of Kings, Sweeney's (1995) evaluation of the Deuteronomistic critique of Solomon, and Brettler's (1989) analysis of the support for the house of David evidenced by the book of Judges. Identifying these textual forms, patterns, and themes enables scholars to argue for particular historical locations and functions for the Deuteronomistic History or for parts of it.
For example, those historians who argue that the texts to which they refer depict historical reality, tend to treat the stories they discuss as a record of actual relations between groups of people in ancient Syria-Palestine (such as Albright 1935; 1939; 1963; Kenyon 1985; Bright 1981; and our more detailed discussion below). In their view, then, the biblical texts they use in their historical reconstructions describe actual ethnic groups, ethnic relations, and ethnicity. Where these events are to be located in time, however, and thus, according to their views on ethnicity, when the groups described originated and lived, depends, at least in part, on their view of when the texts are to be dated.

Some have responded to the problems of dating by treating biblical texts generally as literature, without supposing that they relate in any way to some sort of historical reality and without considering the relationship between the texts and the world in which they were produced (see, for example, Alter 1981; Jobling 1986; Klein 1988). Even those who have continued to approach historical issues but from a position more cognizant of the Bible as literature have tended to devalue its historical reliability and validity and have emphasized the lateness of its creation and the ideological nature of its contents (see, for example, Ahlström 1993; Davies 1992; Lemche 1988; Thompson 1992. Note Brettler 1989 for an example specific to the book of Judges). These scholars, therefore, see the texts reflecting more the agendas of the latest editors than any early historical “reality.” Thus, in their view and as we will discuss in greater detail below, Israelite ethnicity, which must have had a specific point of origin (because of their understanding of ethnicity), is to be

11 See Provan (1995) for a review of the field and of the debate between the historical positivists and the literary positivists.
found in the period when various earlier texts were redacted (see, for example, Thompson 1992:422-423).

Mullen's recent work, which does address ethnicity, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries* (1993), locates the text that he analyzes specifically in the time of the final redaction by the Deuteronomistic historian (c. 550 B.C.E.). He argues that, in the Judahite reality of that period, it functioned ritually to create and maintain a particular ethnic configuration (Mullen 1993:9-10). However, an assumption that there already was an ethnic unit called "Israel" underlies the study and Mullen's argument focuses on how the text functioned to identify, create, and maintain that ethnic identity in the face of threats to its unity (1993:16, 283). He suggests that the overarching Deuteronomistic argument, that is, that Israel failed to remain completely true to Yahweh, failed to maintain ethnic purity, and failed to remain true to their value system, is an indication of three areas where Israel's ethnic unity had broken down (1993:17). The Deuteronomistic historian, in Mullen's view, took pains to construct the history in order to represent a particular view of the religious and ethnic distinctiveness of Israel (1993:286). While the agenda of the Deuteronomistic historian that Mullen proposes is certainly plausible, Mullen still begs the question as to what in the text is particularly "ethnic" and how the text expresses its particular view of "ethnicity." His epistemology of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic relations is not presented clearly. As we shall see below, implicit in Mullen's analysis is a view of ethnicity that does not fully account for the flexibility of the process of ethnic boundary formation and description.

Within the broad sweep of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole, the book of Judges itself purports to depict a period in the life of Israel before it had attained relative stability and unity as a nation under a king and, in fact, a period when the people
of the area slipped into apostasy and were dominated and controlled by their neighbours (Brueggemann 1981). The tales in Judges illustrate certain clear Deuteronomistic themes: members of the community lose their independence and are “sold into the hand of” various of their enemies because they do not follow the stipulations of the conditional covenant with their god, Yahweh, who remains, nonetheless, ever-merciful (Cross 1973; Boling 1975; Brettler 1989; Gray 1986; Greenspahn 1986; Peckham 1993); the protagonists, the Judges, are in some cases idealized leaders who take the people to freedom and reestablish the correct, according to the Deuteronomist, covenantal relationship with Yahweh and thus prefigure the role of the ideal king, David, later in the History (Cross 1973; Boling 1975; Brettler 1989; Peckham 1993); in other stories the Judges represent antiheroes, rather than heroes, who exemplify the problem of leadership by a single individual and thus imply a critique of the institution of kingship (Boling 1975; Klein 1988).

The basic Deuteronomistic pattern as found in Judges is expressed in a simplified and formulaic fashion in Judg 3:7-11. The Israelites did “evil” according to the standards of their deity, wayyaʿāšū bēnē yišrāʾêl ‘et-hāraʾ bēnē yhwh (Judg 3:7). Yahweh, therefore, became angry and he “sold” Israel into servitude under another people, wayyimkērêm bēyad, in this case, the King of Cushanrishathaim (Judg 3:8). But the Israelites “cried out” to Yahweh, wayyiṣqōt bēnē-yišrāʾêl ‘el-yhwh (Judg 3:9), and he raised up a deliverer, wayyiṣqōt yhwh mōṣîʿaʾ (Judg 3:10) and led them to victory over King Cushanrishathaim. There was thus peace for forty years, wattisqōt ḥāʾaṭeṣ ’arbaʿîm šānāḥ (Judg 3:11). This basic formula is repeated as a structuring principle in all of the stories of the major Judges (Greenspahn 1986).

Expressed schematically: Israel “sins” and Yahweh imposes punishment; Israel “cries
out” and Yahweh saves (Brueggemann 1981).

These central themes, which permeate the Deuteronomistic History, overlay and add to core stories which were first formed in earlier contexts. The original tales, in Boling’s view, each present “the story of an exemplary figure in popular language for popular edification and delight” (1975:31). However, they are not unsophisticated fantasies but rather, in his view, the work of “a guild of professional storytellers in premonarchical Israel” (1975:32). Yet, because of the Deuteronomistic editing, “they are employed in an evaluative presentation of Israel’s historical life in that period” (Boling 1975:35).

How scholars use the book of Judges in their historical reconstructions also depends in large part on how they view the historicity of the source narratives. On one side, for example, is Halpern (1988), who argues that the Deuteronomistic historian remained true to the originals and so the tales are useful for constructing a history of pre-monarchic Israel. The Deuteronomistic edition generated the last changes in what we now have as the finished text but this process, in his view, does not invalidate the book of Judges as a source for the early history of Israel (1988:20-24). At the other extreme is the analysis of van Seters, who suggests that the Deuteronomist’s agenda is so completely woven through the original tales that it is difficult to separate the earlier material from the later (1983:342-346). In his view, the Deuteronomist’s own theological interests were what created the period of the judges and the description of events, not as an impartial and accurate description of what-took-place but as an expression of the Deuteronomist’s agenda (1983b:345-346).

Obviously, a history of the period described by the book of Judges is not a simple or straightforward matter. Our concern in this work, however, is not with the history of any one particular ethnic group but rather it is with ethnic theory and with
the manner in which ethnicity is expressed. Therefore, we will not attempt to define
the sequence of redactional strata in the book of Judges or trace the history of dif-
ferent ethnic configurations by analyzing the history of the text itself.

In our study we will follow Mullen and other scholars who focus on the com-
plete and final redaction of the book of Judges by the Deuteronomistic historian dated
to the exilic period. In particular, we will accept the theory of the Deuteronomist
proposed by Peckham (1985; 1993), who builds on the work of Noth (1981). Peck-
ham suggests that the Deuteronomistic history "was composed by one author"
(1985:73), who used written sources that "were not fragments transmitted and
preserved for their antiquarian interest but the story of the nation interpreted and aug-
mented by generations of historians" (1985:73). The hand of the author of the history
is evident in its organization and structure, interests, style and language, and historical
argument (1985; 1993:518-655). It was composed after the fall of Jerusalem (Peck-
ham 1993:7). There is no unanimity among scholars on the problem of the
Deuteronomist, however, and other theories, such as those that propose that the his-
tory was composed in two major editions (Cross 1973; Nelson 1981), or that it
included earlier materials that originated in the northern kingdom of Israel (Weinfeld
1992), or that it formed a more complex compilation of a number of earlier source
materials (Halpern 1988), focus on identifying and defining the component parts and
sources of the history. The suggestion of Peckham's theory is that there is a unity of
intent and purpose in the Deuteronomistic history that is evidence of the hand of a
single author. This view is advantageous, especially for our study, since it explains
and describes the unified perspective and synthesis created by the Deuteronomistic
historian. This theory, therefore, leads us to suggest that, because the whole history
was a single-authored composition, we should be able to treat the complete story of
each major judge with all of the interactions and relations it describes as a composition with a unified perspective. Thus, the portrayal of relations and interactions between groups and their representatives that the stories of the major judges contain and which we will examine below, may be treated as descriptions that are coherent and consistent, reflecting the views of a single author, rather than diffuse and disjointed, reflecting the views of multiple authors from different time periods. Our study, therefore, focuses on ethnicity as portrayed by the Deuteronomistic historian in the stories of the major judges.

Although Mullen may be correct to argue that the Deuteronomistic History was a response to the “crisis of the exile” in which its author(s) proposed a particular redefinition of “Israelite” and “Judahite” ethnicity (1993:9, n.24), as we have said, our concern is not with the character and nature of the particular ethnic group to which the Deuteronomistic historian belonged or with the history of the particular ethnic milieu in which the text was composed. Rather, our concern is with the manner in which group identity is described and expressed in the stories of the major judges as described by the Deuteronomistic historian. Our question is, does group identity as portrayed by the Deuteronomistic historian in the tales of Judges correspond to the anthropological model of ethnic identity we will outline below? And, if so, what are the characteristics of that ethnic identity as portrayed by the Deuteronomist that depict the processes of ethnicity outlined in our study?

The second general problem that has characterized studies of Israelite identity and, as we have said, the one we wish to address explicitly in the third chapter of this study, is that scholars who have discussed the problem of identity in terms of ethnicity have not clearly explained their model or epistemology of ethnicity. They have appropriated uncritically what appear to be common-sense definitions of ethnicity and
applied these to the biblical text. In effect, they have begged the question of whether or not the text does, in fact, accurately depict relations that today we would typify in anthropological terms as ethnic. Those who have addressed the issue have simply assumed that the text does depict interactions and relations between different “ethnic” groups and have argued that the “ethnicity” they find in the textual data refers to one of three time periods: (i) the period pictured in the events as narrated (for example, Halpern 1983b), (ii) the period of time belonging to the first author or editor of the text (who was writing some time after the events the narrative describes) (for example, van Seters 1983), and (iii) the period of time belonging to the final editor of the text (who was writing well after the events the narrative describes and also after the story was first set down and fixed in written form) (for example, Thompson 1992).

Since these studies have appropriated the concept “ethnicity” uncritically and without complete awareness, understanding, or consideration of the assumptions or implications inherent in different anthropological approaches to ethnicity, it is necessary to give some attention to this lack of what Provan (1995) has termed epistemological self-awareness. We will address explicitly, therefore, what has been assumed implicitly. Our aim will be to apply a model of ethnicity to determine if the text’s depiction of relations between groups of people or their representatives, in this case interactions depicted in the major judge narratives of the book of Judges, are relations that can be characterized as “ethnic” relations in terms of the anthropological model we will develop below.

12 Syro-Palestinian archaeologists have been guilty also of not being explicit about their models of how ethnicity is manifested in the archaeological record (see Dever 1993 for a discussion).
This approach necessitates that we first develop a model of ethnic relations and interactions that is rooted securely in anthropological theory. We will then apply the model to various texts depicting interactions between groups and individuals and analyze them to determine if, in fact, the groups of people and the relations and interactions between them are depicted in a manner that we can characterize as "ethnic" and to illustrate how an appropriately anthropological model of ethnicity can be applied to some of these stories. By defining a theory of ethnicity first and then by examining the text in light of the model of ethnicity, we can determine if ethnicity is described in the text at all.

Once this is resolved, there may be additional historical implications for either the emergence or later adaptations of the group Israel, but these are beyond the scope of this study. Our focus, as we have said, is not on the text as it may have functioned in a particular community at any one particular time, but rather on how the stories of the major judges depict distinctions between groups of people and their representatives. We are not concerned with the "stuff" or "content" of any one historically particular configuration of an identity, such as, for example, Iron age Israelite identity, but rather with the manner in which ethnic identity is constructed and portrayed in the stories of the major judges.

Our question in this work does not, therefore, deal with the history of any one particular period in time and it does not presume that the text presents an historically coherent picture of any particular time period. Instead, we will take as an heuristic approach the view that the text presents its own reality (Carter 1996; Davies 1994). Our particular focus is on the way in which the text describes interactions and distinctions rather than on an historical reality to which most biblical historians already suppose the text refers and more-or-less accurately describes. Ours is, in this sense, a
textual study, but from an explicit social scientific perspective. Our questions are not concerned with the historical ethnic "reality" of ancient Israel but rather with the textual reality. We consider the manner in which the text depicts interactions and relations between people that we, with our particular theoretical lens, describe as "ethnic." Ethnicity, for the analytic purposes of this study, exists in the text itself. When events actually occurred or when descriptions of events were actually written down is not the issue. Rather, we seek to understand the principles underlying the description of peoples and events and the expressions of group differentiation.¹³

We will not, in this study, treat the text as a transparent window which will allow us to view ethnic relations as if we were dispassionate observers of the past, but rather we will view the text itself as a participant in the process that differentiated and distinguished the people "Israel" from her surrounding neighbours. Our focus here is on how the text depicts the differences and relations among the various groups and characters in the narratives. Our question is, can this depiction be described accurately as "ethnic?" The point in this work is to examine the congruities between the text and a model of ethnicity drawn from anthropological theory of ethnicity. We seek, therefore, the relationship between a general model of one aspect of social reality, in this case, a model of ethnicity, and the Deuteronomistic historian's description of groups and interaction between groups and their representatives.

Our approach will be to develop a model of ethnicity. The model will be drawn from anthropological theory on ethnicity. It will show that expressions of ethnicity

¹³ However, the validity of these images for historical studies must be treated also, but from an independent perspective in order for our findings to be confirmed. And, as Whitelam (1994) suggests, the archaeological data may be helpful in this regard. But that is a whole other field of research, related to the problem, but not one we will address here.
have two faces, one which emphasizes the timeless, *a priori*, or primordial elements of a group's identity and another which emphasizes that the group’s identity is defined in response to particular circumstances. A group’s ethnicity, encompassing these two facets, does not describe a group’s identity as fixed or static but rather it describes the group as being malleable and flexible in the face of changing circumstances. We then will determine if the stories of the major judges describe relations and interactions between groups of people and their representatives in a way that is consistent with the model.

If the stories of the major judges depict groups and interactions between groups and their representatives in a way that is consistent with the model, we will be able to suggest a number of conclusions. First, it will illustrate the utility of the model in this case showing that ethnicity and group identity as portrayed in the major judge stories are not simply an expression of only a primordially defined collection of individuals who form an ethnic community through no choice of their own. The ethnic group identities portrayed in these stories are flexible and malleable, defined and created by the members of the group themselves from the resources of their own pasts as they adapt, recreate, and renew their identity in the context of changing developments and circumstances which surround them.  

Second, it will indicate that the group identities and interactions between groups and their representatives that are described in these narratives of the major judges may be described appropriately as “ethnic” identities. Historical considerations may follow from this conclusion but

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14 Our focus on a limited set of expressions of Israelite identity is a limited test, however. Additional work could be done on the history of the processes of adaptation in the group’s identity at particular points in Israelite history and on the methods and types of renewals the community used to form its identity but, again, these are beyond the scope of the current work.
these are beyond the scope of this work. Third, it will show what were both the primordial features and the circumstantial contexts which were portrayed in expressions of ethnicity described in the stories of the major judges. We will see that labels, represented by group names, kinship, and religion generally express the primordial face of a group’s identity in the stories of the major judges, although these features are not all the same in each case and not all are used in every story of every judge. Furthermore, we will see that economic, political, and religious circumstances generally are the situations which are active in the definition of group identities in these same stories although, as with the primordial aspect, there is variability and not all of these conditions apply in every case. We note that the overall framework of identity defined by these two aspects is applied to groups as portrayed by the Deuteronomistic historian. We will see that in each of the stories of the major judges, the primordial and circumstantial elements of group identity apply to the sub-groups or tribes of Israel and to different configurations of sub-groups which are described as coming together in the exigencies of a particular situation. Despite this variation in group configuration, the framework of primordial and circumstantial expressions of group identity remains throughout. This bifaceted quality of ethnic identity shows that, although the primordial and circumstantial elements of the identities portrayed in the stories of the major judges vary from story to story, the process whereby the two facets are used in the expression of group identity is present in each example. In other words, the bifaceted quality of identity is evident in each case while the social, political, economic, or religious features which define the identities differ from story to story. The differences in the content of the group identities portrayed in the stories may be significant for the history of the groups involved and for the history of Israel, but consideration of these issues is beyond the scope of the current work.
Our thesis is that the model we propose does enable us to offer a theoretically supported interpretation of ethnic relations in the stories of the major judges. Ethnicity is portrayed in a manner which can be identified and described by the model. The processes of ethnicity characterized by the anthropological theory of ethnicity we advance below are evident in the stories of the major judges. The tales do depict ethnic identities being determined in part by the participants in response to changing circumstances and in part by earlier definitions of identity which are described in primordial terms. We will see that the group’s identity is not pictured as being entirely a priori, natural, static, or fixed but that it is described also being constructed and created by the characters involved in the action.

Definitions

We will briefly define at this point what we mean by the terms “ethnicity,” “ethnic,” and “religion.” We shall explore in greater detail below different theoretical perspectives on ethnicity. However, before diving deeper into these theoretical waters, a brief outline of what we mean by the terms will provide a baseline for the discussion.

The word *ethnicity*, an abstract noun, is a relatively recent term in the English language. It does not appear, for example, in the 1951 second edition of the *Webster’s New International Dictionary*. It is listed in the 1969 reprinting of the *Oxford English Dictionary* with the meaning “heathendom, heathen superstition.” The 1972 *Supplement* adds a second sense, “ethnic character or peculiarity,” and cites in its etymological notes references to its earliest use with this meaning in 1953 and 1964. The second edition (1989) of the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists both senses. Sollors
(1989:xiii) cites a book published in 1941 by W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt entitled *The Social Life of a Modern Community* as the first instance where the word appeared in print.

However, the root of the noun, *ethnicity*, goes back to classical Greek. The root *ethnos* appears in English in an adjective, *ethnic*, as in ethnic group, ethnic food, or ethnic clothing, in a combining form, *ethno-*, as in ethnocentrism, and with a suffix added to make the abstract noun, *ethnicity*.

The classical writers used *ethnos* to describe large amorphous groups of beings, animal or human. Ambiguous English terms such as “throng” or “swarm” are used in similar fashion. Sophocles used *ethnos* for wild animals (*Philoctetes* 1147; *Antigone* 344), Aeschylus used it for the Furies (*Eumenides* 366) and for the Persians (*Persai* 43, 56), and Aristotle used it in opposition to “Hellenes” when he signified foreign and barbarous peoples (*Politics*, 1324.b.10; all quoted in Chapman, McDonald, Tonkin 1989:12). Thus, the Greek word *ethnos* signified on a general level a distinct group of creatures, animals or people, who lived together and who could be separated from other groups (Liddell, Scott, Jones 1968).

In a more narrow sense, it was used by Aristotle to label those who dwelt primarily in north-western Greece and whose social organization he considered to be “primitive” (*Politics*, 1324.b.10). The rural non-Greek *ethné* were contrasted to the people and social organization of the Greek city state, or *polis* (Just 1989). The members of such rural groups were understood to be “outsiders,” provincial foreigners, and uncivilized, uncultured, irreligious barbarians who spoke unintelligible languages in contrast to the civilized folk of the cities.

The Latin adjective *ethnicus*, derived from *ethnos*, continued the latter’s use as a term to denote a group considered, by the word’s user, to be uncivilized (*Harpers’*
Latin Dictionary 1899). It, and the semantically related paganus, were used by Christian writers for gentiles or non-Christians and so it attained the meaning of heathen (Harpers' Latin Dictionary 1899). Thus, notions of religious identity were wrapped up with the term so that members of ethnic groups were not only uncivilized but also pagan. This is reflected in the first O.E.D. definition of ethnicity as “heathendom, heathen superstition.” In the widest sense this term signified a group of a similar kind, a people or nation. If the usage carried the implication that the group was unified by virtue of birth, then the word signified what in English is termed a breed, species, or race. The semantically related Latin term, natio, however, usually carried a more limited meaning and was used to signify a distant and barbarous people. It was thus closest to the Greek ethnos and “nation” became one of the standard English terms for distinct groups of people (Harpers' Latin Dictionary 1899; see also Just 1989:71-88).

The second meaning in the O.E.D., “ethnic character or peculiarity,” expresses current usage. Ethnicity signifies those qualities and characteristics which are typical of and serve to identify particular groups. This is the general sense which we will use in this work.

A more tightly focused definition is very difficult and, in fact, most anthropologists have not tried to specify a precise and unequivocal meaning for the word itself. They have, however, considered more carefully the concept from a theoretical perspective and we will treat this work in the next chapter. In an early survey, Isajiw (1974) examined 65 studies dealing with ethnicity and found only 13 with explicit definitions of the term. Isajiw pointed out that many writers seemed to feel that the concept was so commonplace as not to require clear-cut definition or they assumed that the ethnicity of the group they studied was obvious and thus required no explanation. Some recent work, such as the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Eth-
Groups, has proposed a very broad perspective so that any collective group which has cultural attributes in common can be defined as an ethnic group (Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin 1981). The problem with this approach is that almost any collectivity — unions, sects, occupational groups, classes — can be described as an ethnic group.

A more cautious view, and the one we will follow here, underlines the main identifying characteristics but does not see such typical characteristics as necessarily having to be the dominant or primary determining elements of the identity. Such a definition is suggested by Cornell (1996). He proposes that the main "distinguishing feature of ethnic identification . . . is the claimed bond of blood or its approximation. Ethnicity is family writ large" (1996:268-269). As well, he suggests that an ethnic identity (as distinct from any other kind of identity) "should also include the assertion on the part of group members of at least a history, if not a present, of common culture" (1996:269). An ethnic group and expressions of ethnicity should include, then, at least references to kinship and common culture.

However, as our concern in this work is not with identifying or describing the characteristics and features of any historically particular ethnic configuration, it is, in our view, more important to identify and define clearly the theoretical approach that will be used when addressing the topic of ethnicity. Our aim is to establish epistemological clarity. We will focus, therefore, on describing and clarifying the theory of ethnicity below more completely.

One of the concerns of the present work is with the role religion plays in ethnicity, statements of ethnic identity, and ethnic relations. We should have, therefore, an applicable definition of religion.15 In this study, we mean religion to refer to

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15 On the definition of religion see further the discussion of Clarke and Byrne (1993) and bibliography there.
theistic belief systems with one or more deities who may or may not be characterized as relating to humans through intermediaries, with cultic practices characterized by sacrifices carried out by a cultic elite, adherents who demonstrate their devotion and allegiance with behaviours ranging from individual asceticism to public celebration, and a mythic literature which tells of the deities' activities in both transcendent and earthly realms.16

Religion, furthermore, is clearly related to ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic relations. It is, for many social scientists, an important element in definitions of collective identity such as ethnicity (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995). In general, scholars of ethnicity have treated religion in one of two ways, depending upon their theoretical stance. We will discuss the place of religion in theories of ethnicity in greater detail below but note at this point that Geertz (1973b) is representative of one group who treat ethnic groups as a priori entities and who see religion as a defining characteristic which plays an active role in tying people together and which can be used to identify an individual as a member of a particular group. Cohen (1969) is indicative of the second position in which ethnic groups are treated as associations of people held together by similar interests and motivations. From this perspective religion is one

16 It is interesting, but also unfortunate and disturbing, that none of the standard works on the "religion" of Israel or the "religion" of any other culture in the ancient Near East explicitly address the problem of definition. Frank Moore Cross's magnum opus, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (1973), which has the sub-title, "Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel," does not define "religion." The recent festschrift for Cross, Ancient Israelite Religion (Miller, Hanson, and McBride 1987), contains not a single article with even just one paragraph on the issue. Similarly, a study such as Anderson's Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance (1987), states only that "The distinctiveness of the Israelite cult is nothing other than the limitation of cultic activity to one particular patron deity" (1987:3). Likewise, Ackerman (Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah) defines her topic only by stating that it is not normative Deuteronomistic religion (1992:2). This lacuna possibly reflects the roots of biblical studies in a tradition of scholarship that owes much to theology and assumptions about the nature of religion.
social factor among many (including, for example, political and economic factors) which people use to define themselves and others as distinct groups if, in the context of particular circumstances, they find it advantageous to do so.

These two perspectives have implications for the definition of religion. There is a similarity between the views of ethnic primordialists who, as I will discuss in greater detail below, define ethnic groups as *a priori* entities and those scholars of religion who tend to define religion as an essential and *a priori* reality. Both subjects of study, ethnicity and religion, are believed to have an objective existence which can be revealed and described through proper scientific scrutiny. Indeed, from this view, a particular religion usually is one of the key categories which identifies and actively defines a particular ethnic group.

There is, likewise, a similarity between the views of ethnic instrumentalists who argue, as we will explore in greater detail below, that ethnic groups are defined and define themselves through interactions in the context of particular circumstances and those scholars of religion who propose, not an essential definition for religion, but an operational definition (Clarke and Byrne 1993:17). In both perspectives, ethnicity and religion are described as being historically and situationally specific and dependent on circumstances rather than on *sui generis* characteristics. In this view, religion and ethnic identity may be congruent or not; each case must be studied individually.

In our view, and as we shall argue more fully in what follows, the second model best explains the data, both for ethnicity and religion. Each religion is best accounted for by including the particular conditions surrounding it: historical, economic, political, or social. Note, however, that our study is not a history of Israelite religion, just as it is not a history of Israelite ethnicity. Ethnicity is best explained as depending both on the exigencies of particular circumstances as well as on primor-
dially defined transcendent realities. However, a key factor is that a claim to transcendent primordiality may carry a great deal of authority. Thus, and as we will demonstrate more clearly below, a religious claim with its strong recourse to statements about transcendent reality can provide very strong support for a claim to ethnic identity and, in effect, produce what appears, especially from a position within the group, to be a primordial or essential claim.

In the remainder of this work we will explore expressions of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges in accordance with an explicit model of ethnicity. Our study will begin with an examination of anthropological theories for ethnicity and outline the key explanatory approaches scholars have taken to ethnicity: primordial, circumstantial, or synthetic. We will describe a synthetic model of ethnicity which we will apply in our reading of the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges. We will then examine approaches to ethnicity taken by a number of scholars who have dealt with Israelite identity to demonstrate their theoretical and epistemological weakness when using the concept of ethnicity. Our aim in the remainder of the work is to contribute to closing the gap between theory and interpretation by illustrating the application of a theoretically clear model of ethnicity to a reading of the stories of the major judges: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. In our examination of the textual data we will not consider the characters termed the “minor Judges” who are described in very short formulaic statements that provide no descriptive information about interactions and relations between groups or individuals. Neither will we examine the final narratives concerning the migration of the tribe of Dan and the inter-tribal strife with the Benjaminites, which do not involve particular judge-heroes. Rather, our intention is to indicate how, in relating the stories of the major judges, the writer of these texts,
the Deuteronomistic historian, also portrays relations and interactions between the characters and groups that, when read from the perspective of an explicit model of ethnicity, reveal something about how ethnic identity is depicted in these stories.
ETHNIC THEORY
Ethnic Theory

Introduction

We have suggested, and will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, that scholars who consider the issue of Israelite identity have not adequately defined the theory of ethnicity they use when discussing the *ethnic* character of Israelite identity. And yet the terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic” appear frequently in work on the Israelites. This is a problem because describing Israel as an ethnic group, but without defining or discussing ethnicity itself, reveals more about the scholar’s own presuppositions and prejudices about the nature of human groups in general and about the origins of Israel in particular than about the *ethnic* identity of the group itself. Our argument here is that the epistemology of ethnicity used in analyzing Israelite ethnic identity must be explicit.

The model we propose will be developed from recent anthropological theorizing on ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic group relations. The applicability of such a model depends on the anthropological assumption that all humans have and have had, in at least the past four thousand years, a talent and an ability for defining group identity in a manner that can appropriately be termed, in our discourse, “ethnic.” In other words, we assume that models of ethnicity drawn from anthropological research on a variety of cultures at a variety of times since the discipline began may be applicable to the development of a model that can be applied to other evolutionally modern humans.\(^\text{17}\) Once we have developed the model it will be applied to textual data to determine whether or not the book of Judges does depict the groups described in the

\(^{17}\) Although anthropologists may have theoretical debates about what constitutes or does not constitute a “universal” theory, that discussion is beyond the scope of our work.
stories of the major judges in ethnic terms and, if so, whether or not the ethnic groups are portrayed in a manner that reveals both primordial and circumstantial aspects of ethnicity.

The aim of this approach is to demonstrate how the portrayal of relations and interactions between the characters in the stories of the major judges provide an example — a case study — of how ethnic identity may be expressed and, in particular, to provide an interpretation of how the Deuteronomistic Historian expressed Israelite ethnic identity. In order to carry out this program we need to have a sound theoretical understanding of ethnicity and of the processes, qualities, and social features which give a group its characteristic ethnic identity. We turn to this topic now.

The issue of collective identity, its causes and forms, is a classic theme in sociological and anthropological theory (see, for example, Weber 1978; Durkheim 1915; 1964; Shils 1957; and especially Eisenstadt & Giesen 1995 for a recent overview). Many studies have been concerned with the differences between the primary group, Gemeinschaft, of traditional societies and the secondary group, Gesellschaft, of modern civil society (see, for example, Shils 1957). However, the commonly held view through most of the twentieth century that modernity ultimately would result in universal inclusiveness for all of humanity has been challenged by obvious recent upsurges in ethnic sentiment and conflict (Tambiah 1989). The question of group identity, whether groups are "natural" divisions within human society or whether they are formed by collective social action, thus remains the central issue underpinning much of the discussion (Eisenstadt & Giesen 1995).

The anthropological and sociological literature on ethnicity is vast. There has been a virtual explosion of information since the late 1960s. This has occurred in a period that has also been characterized by increased ethnic conflict in numerous
countries around the world and by an increase in public awareness of and media attention given to ethnic groups and their struggles. The volume of material means we cannot present a complete overview of the field of ethnic studies. Furthermore, the context for much of the recent interest in ethnicity is that of modern pluralist societies, that is, societies and nations which are characterized by numerous distinct ethnic groups and often by ethnic conflict. Detailed discussion of all of these studies is beyond the scope of our work. What is relevant to our study is material dealing with the theory of ethnicity and ethnic groups. We will briefly summarize the field and set the context for the theoretical discussion which follows.

Until the late 1960s modern anthropological definitions of ethnicity tended to use a structural-functionalist perspective. In Buchignani’s view, this “. . . oriented the discipline towards questions of homogeneity, holism, consensus and system maintenance in the context of coherent social units” (Buchignani 1982:1). It could be said, although it is somewhat an oversimplification, that the structural-functional approach assumed an ethnic group was a concrete and immutable social fact. In Cohen’s estimation, the goal of research during this period was “. . . to understand assumedly homogeneous sociocultural units as entities, the relations of their parts to one another and to the whole, and the relation of the whole and its parts to their physical and sociocultural environments” (Cohen 1978:381). Ethnicity was assumed a priori to be a category which could be used to define a social group. Religion was understood to be one of the cultural elements which was a part of and which identified particular ethnic categories and analysis focused on the function of religion within the group. So, for example, in his study of ritual of rebellion, Gluckman did not question if the

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18 For a recent overview see, for example, Thompson (1989).
Swazi existed as an identifiable ethnic group. He assumed that there was a group called the Swazi who performed a ritual called the Incwala ceremony and his research then showed how this ritual functioned to create and maintain social unity within the group (discussed in Morris 1987:250). Such an approach ignored the problems of adaptation in changing circumstances and essentially removed human creativity and interest from the explanation of society.

Large-scale societies which were described from the structural-functional point of view often were characterized as “pluralist” societies. The structural-functionalists suggested that in such societies the

... ethnic boundaries are solidly reinforced by institutional ones, which makes the boundaries that much more rigid and the groups which they enclose mutually discrete. Plural societies are normally described in terms which make little allowance for a flow of personnel across ethnic lines or changes of individual identity (Nagata 1979:185).

This approach assumed a “mosaic” picture of society.

A different model of ethnicity, but with similar presuppositions, was predominant in North America during the 1950s and 1960s when the typical image of ethnic relations was that of the “melting pot.” Anthropologists focused their research primarily on issues of assimilation and acculturation. However, rather than describing such processes in terms of flexible ethnic divisions where boundaries were crossed, removed, or recreated in varying degrees, research continued to assume the existence of concrete ethnic groups which, it was believed, simply “dissolved” into the culture of the dominant “ethnic-less” community (Nagata 1979:186-187).

At the beginning of the 1970s these two views and the whole structural-functional approach were brought into question. Indeed, there was a significant
paradigm shift out of which emerged two clear theoretical positions. We will survey a number of key articles and books which have appeared since the late 1960s which are significant to understanding developments in the anthropological theory of ethnicity and which are relevant to our study. We will briefly outline the two main theoretical points of view and present a third, more integrative, position. This third will provide the theoretical base for our study.

By the mid-1970s two theoretical approaches to ethnicity were clear. These positions were first articulated plainly by N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan in 1975 in the introduction to a book they co-edited entitled *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. The first approach describes ethnicity as a primordial or independent category and the second views it as a circumstantial or dependent category. We turn now to an examination of both of these categories in more detail.

The Primordialist Approach

Anthropologists who explain ethnicity as a primordial category describe it as an independent variable which determines a group’s identity. They hold the view that an ethnic identity comes from “... a corpus of basic, elemental, and irreducible loyalties, with a power of their own, whatever the nature of the external social environment” (Nagata 1979:188). A group’s identity, interests, strategies, and all of the social features which define it as a group distinct from other groups are determined by its ethnicity. From this perspective the identity of the members of a group is fixed by factors beyond their control. Group members are held together by an ineffable and coercive absolute, the tie of blood and ethnicity is an absolute and independent category.
Edward Shils (1957:142) was the first to use the word “primordial” to describe those ties that bind individuals to particular groups and that are formed simply because of birth into the group. He suggested that such attachments were not only because of the nature of individual qualities and personal interactions, ties which created a social group like the *bund*, but also because the members of a group all possessed “certain especially significant relational qualities which could only be described as primordial” (Shils 1957:122).

The idea has been used by Clifford Geertz as well. In his view, these congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by the virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself (1973a:259).

The ties that bind the members of an ethnic group together are ties stemming from the particular social features of language, location, religion, kinship, and custom which Geertz (1973a:263) argues are all acquired at birth, and these are the determining factors in one’s ethnic identity. Ethnicity is something very deep and primordial and it establishes ethnic affiliation and identity no matter what the external realities (see also Schermerhorn 1974; Hoiberg and Hraba 1983; and Grosby 1994).

Two further points must be made. First, ethnicity has an ahistorical quality in the primordialist view. Language, location, religion, kinship, and, custom are all understood to be persistent and immutable defining features. They are the elements of an ethnicity which make an individual’s identity and which give an ethnic group its solidarity and longevity. Ethnicity is generally understood to be a constant (Scott
1990:149). If there is change and development it takes place on an evolutionary level and at an evolutionary pace.

Second, ethnicity has an ascriptive quality in the view of the primordialists. That is, behaviour is determined at a psychological level by the fact of ethnicity. The members of the group feel loyalty, solidarity, and trust toward other group members not because of the quality of individual interpersonal relationships but simply because of the fact that group members are related as kin (Scott 1990:151; Dubetsky 1976:435). The converse is true as well. Members of other ethnic groups are treated with mistrust and suspicion simply because they are not related as kin. Thus, not only are the identifying cultural features of a particular ethnic group determined by their primordial quality, but so too are the actions of group members.

One problem with the primordialist perspective is what R. Cohen calls the “unit problem” (1978:381). The issue is focused by questions over how groups are labeled. The primordialist position tends to assume that an ethnic group is a homogeneous unit, clearly bounded and defined by a distinct culture that research is able to determine and define clearly and objectively. However, cases such as Nuer and Dinka, first analyzed and separated into distinct groups by Evans-Pritchard (1940) and later reexamined and found to have been separated and named on the basis of old colonial labels bearing no relation to the names and labels used by the people themselves (Southall 1976), shows that ethnicity is not an objective category defined by distinct cultures.

Taken to its logical extreme, the primordialist position has led to a view of ethnicity and ethnic relations that is based on sociobiology. The strongest proponent of this position is van den Berghe (see, for example, 1971, 1976, 1978, 1980). He argues that sociobiology shows human behaviour is the result of a long evolutionary
process involving "the complex interplay of genotypical, ecological and cultural factors" (1978:403). The result of this view is the assessment that "ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection" (1978:403). This is because ethnic groups are breeding populations that have maintained their distinctiveness by keeping strong territorial and social boundaries with other ethnic groups. This is not to say that migration, conquest, and breeding across boundaries did not take place, or that the argument that all were descended from one ancestor was not partially fictitious. But in his view these conditions are unimportant. Rather, it is the fact that blind and ferocious conflict can arise so easily between ethnic groups and that the feelings and emotions are so irrational and strong which indicates to him the deep "primordiality" of the ethnic divisions (1978:404).

The problems with this view have been summarized quite well by Reynolds (1980) and Scott (1990). The key issue is causation. In the sociobiological view, a person's genetic makeup is the primary determinant of psychology and psychology determines the nature of personal and group relationships (Reynolds 1980:313). There is a certain rigidity in this explanation which irks those who prefer to see humans as having much more freedom. The argument is opposed as well to most social scientific thought which suggests it is primarily a person's mind which constructs and determines the individual's sense of self, interpersonal relationships, and, ultimately, group relationships. In his defense against Reynolds, van den Berghe (1980:480) is less dogmatic about the issue, and suggests that, just as it would be foolish to ignore cultural influences on human behaviour, it would also be foolish to ignore biological influences. Further research is required, he says, to determine just how much and what kind of behaviour is genetically based. It is clear, however, that the whole cause of ethnic distinctions is not biological.
Despite the problems with the sociobiological approach, it does highlight one important point. That is, ethnicity does appear to have a resilience and a strength which in certain circumstances give ethnically based claims a vociferousness which, at times, may lead to extreme conflict. It seems, therefore, that ethnicity cannot be based just on momentary divisions and interactions between groups alone. It does have a primordial side.

The primordial side of ethnicity can link it to the idea of race. Race basically naturalizes whatever prevailing view of "group" applies (Goldberg 1992:559-560). In other words, the distinctions and differences in behaviour between people are rationalized and expressed as being natural distinctions and differences due, ultimately, to laws of nature. Dissimilarities are usually expressed biologically and in the language of kinship. Thus, race is often thought to define groups on the basis of biological differences whereas ethnicity is thought to define groups more on the basis of cultural differences.

Goldberg suggests (1992:553), however, that the choice to use "biology" as the paradigmatic defining feature is, in fact, a cultural choice and that it is only the "myth" of common descent that makes it appear to be biological. No human group is completely biologically pure (see the classic statement of Boas 1940). Thus, race is used to articulate what really are cultural and not biological distinctions. Indeed, the distinction Goldberg points out is between a rhetoric of culture that is used when differences are expressed in terms of ethnicity and a rhetoric of descent that is used when differences are expressed in terms of race (1992:555).

Although race was the standard term for describing different human groups until perhaps the middle of the twentieth century it has generally fallen out of use in recent
discussion. Some authors have simply replaced race with ethnicity (see, for example, the work of van den Berghe. Note also the discussion by Goldberg 1992:553-557). In general, anthropological discourse about distinctions between groups in terms of culture uses ethnicity as the key explanatory concept, while discussion about distinctions in terms of biology often use race as the key explanatory concept.

Although “race” is not a term currently used by biblical scholars working on the identity of early Israel, some have tended to assume that the people of Israel were distinct from the people of neighbouring groups in an essentially biological manner. And although the word “race” does not appear, the idea has retained explanatory power that is just masked by the use of “ethnicity” (see, for example, Waters 1991).

At this juncture we will consider very briefly the primordialist understanding of how new ethnic groups are formed. For most writers this is a non-issue since they study ethnicity in the context of the modern reemergence and increased saliency of what are understood to be earlier ethnic groups. From this perspective, the increased activity and reestablishment of ethnic distinctions and activities based on claims of an earlier ethnic identity are important pieces of supporting data for their claim that ethnic distinctions are primordial. Newly emergent ethnic groups are understood to be drawing simply on deep primordially based identities that did not completely disappear beneath a veneer of modern nationalism. Therefore, the question of how wholly new ethnic groups are formed is not treated by most primordialists.

One author who has studied the genesis of new ethnic groups from a primordialist perspective is the Soviet anthropologist L.N. Gumilev (1973). In general, he seems to understand the formation of new ethnic groups as taking place at an evolu-

\[19\] For an overview see Banton (1988).
tionary pace. For example, he suggests that the initial burst of energy which leads to the formation of a new ethnic group comes from individuals possessing biologically determined "drive" (1973:653). In his view, these are people who are less concerned with simply living in harmony with their environment and are more interested in "counteracting the environment" (1973:653). Unitng with others who feel the same way, they form a group which develops a level of social organization and complexity consonant with the historical period of which it is a part. Gumilev argues that eventually the ethnus reaches a level of stasis for a period of time before it begins to decay until it finally disintegrates (1973:652).

The environment figures prominently in Gumilev’s analysis. He argues it is part of a feedback loop which does not completely determine the nature of the ethnic group but which does influence it greatly (1973:654). Biology is also a factor since it is at the root of the individual drive which creates the burst of beginning ethnic energy. Furthermore, as an inherited characteristic, it explains the persistence of ethnicity (1973:654).

Indeed, in a review of Soviet theory on ethnicity, T. Dragadze (1980) points out that most scholars argue the roots of ethnicity are not restricted to any one historical period or stage of social evolutionary development. The outward social manifestations may change over time but the core is essentially omnipresent, expressing "a deep psychological element in humans which causes them to ascribe themselves to an ethnus" (Dragadze 1980:163). Research is focused on explaining the way various ethnic groups develop, the reasons for particular paths of development, and the manner in which different groups interact (Dragadze 1980:164).

Presupposed in this approach is a theory about a natural evolutionary development of humans through more and more complex and larger types of social organiza-
tions, from bands to tribes, chiefdoms, and states (Service 1971). Thus, factors leading to the origin of a particular ethnic group can be described easily since, in fact, the genesis of that group is to be explained ultimately in evolutionary terms. This is expressed in the phrase “historical destinies” in the following quotation: “An important component of ethnic self-identification is the belief in a common origin. Its reality is derived from common historical destinies of ethnic members and their ancestors throughout their existence” (Bromley 1978:18). In other words, the historical complexities of ethnicity are reduced by the members of an ethnic group to an explanation referring to the myth of a common ancestor, according to the ethnogenesists, who themselves reduce the same historical complexities to an evolutionary explanation.

At this point we will briefly underline the view of religion held by anthropologists taking the primordialist perspective. In their view, religion is a primordial given. It is one of the elements of social life which determines an individual’s ethnic identity through its coercive power (see Geertz 1973b:109-110). Religion is thus a primary element in a person’s identity. It is one of the reasons why the members of a group have the identity that they do and it is one of the features which defines them as members of one group as opposed to any other. Chlenov, for example (quoted in Dragadze 1980:168), considers religion to be a particular identifying feature of ethnic groups and the study of religion to be concerned with the relationship between religion and other characteristics particular to the ethnic group. Religion is thus understood to have a certain stability and permanency. It is a conservative and traditional force which keeps members of the community true to the ordained order of being (see Geertz 1973b).
The tendency is for primordialist scholars to view religion as an *a priori* category. It is something that is ahistorical or nearly so. The ultimate ground of religious experience is usually understood to be in a sacred metaphysical reality experienced individually and shared collectively. Indeed, the myths of the group which tell of the role of the ultimate sacred reality in the origins of the group are taken to be essentially true. Such a position is related to the definitions and views of religion expressed most clearly in the work of R. Otto (1958).

The primordial approach to ethnicity was the scholarly norm until roughly the late 1960s. At that point social scientists began to realize that the boundaries and distinctions between groups which had been treated as *a priori* stable categories were, in fact, less stable and less permanent than they had assumed. A paradigm shift occurred in the 1970s as research began to focus more on the flexibility of ethnicity and on the factors and processes involved in the creation and definition of ethnic distinctions. We turn now to a discussion of the approach which developed in reaction to the primordialist position.

The Circumstantialist Approach

In contrast to those who hold the primordialist view, anthropologists who explain ethnicity from a circumstantialist perspective suggest that it is a dependent variable and that it is contingent upon particular circumstances and interactions between groups, particularly in the political and economic realms. Whereas the primordialists tend to reduce ethnic motivations and actions to *a priori* sentiments and structures the circumstantialists tend "... to reduce all ethnic awareness and action ultimately to instrumental political and economic interests and strategies" (Nagata
1979:188). While this statement oversimplifies the case, it does highlight a key circumstantialist point: ethnicity is a dependent variable, determined by such realities as the ecological, economic, or political environment. It is, as Cohen suggests (1978:388), situational and not, as the primordialists argue, an independent variable. In the circumstantialist view, people define different ethnic identities in response to unique interests and goals, and as circumstances change and interests and agendas change, ethnic identity may also change.

Max Weber (1978) and Edmund Leach (1970) both observed and wrote about the flexible nature of group identity but it was the study of Fredrik Barth (1969) which was first recognized in the anthropological community as giving clear expression to the circumstantial understanding of ethnicity. Barth argued that ethnic groups should be seen as forms of social organization (1969:13). In his view, the primary feature of an ethnic group is that its members use particular ethnic categories in a transactional way to describe themselves and others in the course of their interactions. Ethnic groups are not a priori categories in his scheme; they do not and cannot exist apart from interaction. According to Barth, ethnic groups can be defined only to the extent that ethnic identities are used by members of the group to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction. It is only in this way that ethnic groups can exist as organizations (1969:13-14).

Thus: "... ethnic categories provide an organization vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different sociocultural systems" (1969:14). As such, an ethnic category is not a fixed and immutable thing; it is simply a form, without fixed shape or content. In Barth's view, therefore, "the critical focus of investigation ... becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (1969:15).
Furthermore, since ethnic groups are not immutable and since the form and the content of an ethnic category are not fixed, the ethnic identity of an individual or of a group may change. Indeed, Barth suggested that there was incentive for a person to change identity inherent in a change in that person's circumstances. "Different circumstances obviously favour different performances" (Barth 1969:25). What determines ethnic identity then is the relative success of any particular identity in the course of interactions with others and the availability of alternative identities for use in interactions.

It is clear that Barth focused attention on the ethnic boundaries rather than on the ethnic content because he saw that ethnic groups were formed by processes and interactions determined by changing needs and interests. His insight was that ethnic identities were fluid; it was at the boundaries where the processes of definition could best be observed. In the circumstantialist view, the content of an ethnic identity, that is, the particular language, location, religion, kinship, and customs which identify a particular ethnic group, is flexible and defined in response to particular circumstances and interactions with other ethnic groups. From the circumstantialist perspective ethnicity is not a given but a process.

Thus, the culture of a group, that is, the cluster of features, such as residence, language, belief, lifestyles, foodways, and material culture, which are usually understood to be attributes which the members of a group all have in common, are less important for defining a group's identity than are the interactions between a particular group and neighbouring groups. Leach demonstrated this clearly in his study of the Kachin in Burma (1970; see also the comments of Keyes 1976). Culture by itself does not define an ethnic group. Neither is it diagnostic for ethnicity.
A number of scholars have pointed out that Barth's discussion does have its weaknesses. Buchignani (1982:6) suggests that by focusing on inter-personal interaction primarily, Barth has not recognized the importance of institutional and large-scale power relations in determinations of ethnic identity. Barth's theoretical formulation is therefore weak in terms of its ability to explain ethnic social organization while it is strong in terms of its ability to explain ethnic identity. Eickleman (1981:158) argues that Barth has focused only on cultural meanings that are "socially effective" and ignored other aspects of cultural meaning which might not be apparent in terms of social action and interaction. In addition, both Buchignani and Eickelman suggest that Barth tends to assume that the individuals of an ethnic group already have the ethnic identity which he argues is created and maintained only through inter-personal interaction at the boundaries of the group. In other words, his argument is somewhat circular (Buchignani 1982:6; Eickleman 1981:159). Furthermore, the emphasis on boundaries tends to reify them. Cohen (1978:387) points out that Barth implies that ethnic boundaries are "stable and continuing." The danger in this is that the boundaries are treated as fixed and immutable just as the whole ethnic group was treated that way in the primordialist approach.

A key answer to these criticisms is the observation that ethnicity requires an issue in order for the boundaries between ethnic groups to have saliency (R. Cohen 1978:397). Borders crystallize in a particular situation when group leaders are able to mobilize ethnic dichotomies and to highlight differences between groups as a response to the issue. Thus, according to Cohen,

ethnic group formation is a continuing and often innovative cultural process of boundary maintenance and reconstruction. Once the ethnic identities and categories are triggered into being salient, cultural rationalizations for the
legitimacy of the mobilized grouping are actively sought for and created by those involved (1978:397).

Furthermore, not all ethnic boundaries are the same. They can crystallize at different levels of ethnic interactions. Cohen (1978) describes four different types of ethnic interactions: fragmented, indirect, balanced, and stratified. These types are dependent upon the closeness of the interaction between the groups and upon the relative power relations between the groups. Fragmented is used by Cohen to describe a situation where the interacting groups are quite isolated and separate and their power relations are relatively balanced and equal. Indirect ethnic interaction describes groups who are isolated and separate but have unequal power relations. Balanced describes ethnic interaction between groups who are in close contact and who have relatively equal relations in terms of power. Stratified labels the interactions of groups who are in close face-to-face contact and who have unequal power relations (1978:389). This typology is most useful as a heuristic device to illustrate that not all ethnic relations or ethnic boundaries are the same (See Gallagher 1974 for the case of the Ndendeuli).

We turn now to a consideration of how the circumstantial position deals with the question of the formation of new ethnic groups. The overarching focus on the situational context of ethnicity means that this approach has sought to understand the particular circumstances out of which new ethnic organizations have arisen. Most recent research on this issue has been in a twentieth-century context focusing especially on the reemergence of ethnic groups that, it was assumed, had been completely assimilated.

For example, Singer’s (1962) study of Blacks in North America begins with the fact that this population originally came from a variety of cultural backgrounds,
indeed, from different ethnic groups. But the slave experience removed or, at least weakened, the earlier pre-slavery distinctions so that, after slavery was abolished, the slow process of forming a new collectivity began. Thus, out of a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds there emerged a group of people who, for the most part, defined themselves and were defined by others as a homogeneous ethnic group. Singer sees the process of ethnogenesis as taking place over five steps. First, a portion of a population is separated in terms of power relations from the larger group. Second, the smaller group is assigned a particular social role which is then reflected in the division of labour within the whole society. Third, the differentiated groups develop social structures which solidify and help to perpetuate the differential power relations between the two groups. In the fourth step the smaller new group develops awareness of its own corporate "fate." Fifth, there is further "internal development" which takes place in dialogue with "external" relations with the larger group (Singer 1962:424).

R.L. Taylor (1979) has also examined Black ethnogenesis, focusing in particular on forces and processes within the Black community which contributed to the creation of a distinct ethnic identity. In contrast to research which assumed ethnic groups were static entities which would either assimilate and disappear into dominant American culture or continue to exist in some sort of pluralist mosaic, Taylor showed that within a context of urban inequality, occupational concentration, and residential segregation, a number of internal factors, such as the development of all-Black educational facilities, stores, parks, churches, and voluntary organizations, promoted Black ethnicity (1979:1412). Indeed, he concluded by observing that Black ethnicity was strong particularly in the political sphere and that this provided a means to mobilize "... affective social ties, values, symbols, and other 'collective representations' in
order to articulate informal political organization and to advance social, economic, and political interests” (Taylor 1979:1418; see Olien 1988 for another example).

These two cases illustrate three important points about the circumstantialist view of ethnogenesis. First, at least in a colonial or post-colonial context, new ethnic groupings form out of smaller populations within a larger whole. New ethnic groups arise in a situation of domination or subjugation. Second, the process of formation is dialectical, involving not only interaction between the two groups but also internal dialogue and development within the new ethnic group as it comes to recognize and then to bolster its own sense of identity. Third, the new ethnic group matures in accordance with its own developing social, economic, and political interests.

We turn briefly now to the circumstantialist view of religion. Scholars holding a circumstantialist view have tended to follow a Durkheimian tradition regarding the nature of religion (see Paden 1991). Stated in overly simple terms, religion does not refer to a sacred a priori reality, but it is a social phenomenon on the same level and intimately bound up with other social phenomena such as economics and politics. Thus, religion does not cause ethnicity and there is no one-to-one correspondence between religion and ethnicity. Indeed, religious differences need not correspond to ethnic differences.

For example, Canfield’s study (1978) of sectarian myths (Sunni and Shiite) in Afghanistan illustrates how the stories told about the heroes of the two groups serve to bolster and reinforce the moral and social differences between the sects. Indeed, he argues that, although ethnic distinctions in Afghani society do not exactly match current sectarian distinctions, the older sectarian alignments may be reasserted in new circumstances and may lead to new socio-political alignments which follow sectarian lines (1978:42). The point is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between reli-
gious and ethnic distinctions. Religion is not an *a priori* reality which causes, or at least matches, the *a priori* ethnic differences posited by the primordialist approach. Canfield's article points out that religious differences may or may not support ethnic differences, depending upon the circumstances.

Abner Cohen's research on the Muslim Hausa of West-Africa (1969) also illustrates this point. Until Nigerian independence and nationalism in the 1950s, the Hausa maintained an economic advantage in long-distance trade between the coast and the interior. Their ethnic distinctiveness, which had been based on language, place of origin, place of residence, and economic activity, supported this advantage. With independence, however, Hausa economic and ethnic autonomy was threatened. The Yoruba, another West-African ethnic group, began to gain some economic and political advantages over the Hausa. In these new circumstances, the Hausa adopted the Tijaniyya Order, an Islamic Sufi sect. This allowed them to reassert their distinctiveness and to maintain their identity in the face of the homogenizing tendencies of modernization and nationalism. The Hausa case illustrates that neither religion nor ethnicity is a primordial category and that as circumstances change so too can the way in which ethnicity is defined.

One problem with the circumstantialist approach, which is only apparent when the position is taken to its logical extreme, is that ethnicity may appear to be devoid of any content. If an ethnic identity is not based on a specific culture and if it is dependent instead only upon the circumstances and interests of the group at one particular time, then what is ethnicity? The term may be vacuous, as this view does not emphasize the cultural content of the identity. Furthermore, the circumstantialist approach fails to explain the tenacity of ethnic identities which seem to persist over long periods and continue to influence people and define conflicts along ethnic lines.
In response to this criticism, some scholars have formulated an integrative or synthetic approach which attempts to unite elements of both the primordialist and the circumstantialist positions. We turn to this approach now.

The Integrative Synthetic Approach

Most anthropologists have favoured either an exclusively primordial or exclusively circumstantial explanation for ethnicity. More recently, however, some have suggested that both dimensions are active in an ethnic identity and that ethnicity is expressed through both structural and ascriptive action and discourse as well as interactive and situational action and discourse (Vincent 1974, McKay 1982, Scott 1990, Tambiah 1989, and Cornell 1996).

McKay (1982) describes the integrative synthetic approach as a matrix model. On the one axis are the features of a group’s ethnic identity which group members describe and understand in primordial terms. These are the ascriptive elements of ethnicity which they feel are acquired simply by birth into the group. Language, location, and kinship, for example, may all be features over which the members of the group feel they have no choice. In addition, cultural features and symbols which the group sees as persistent characteristics of their identity or, indeed, describe as eternal, and which the group hold to be meaningful for their sense of identity, are primordial. Spicer (1971) has called these the elements of a “persistent cultural identity system.” Furthermore, these primordial elements are often recounted as features from the past which the group uses in the present to define its identity. The perceived and repeated history, which may not be absolutely true, is a meaningful feature for group members and they use it to understand and describe who they are (see Spicer 1971:796 and
Scott 1990:159).

However, according to the synthetic perspective these primordial aspects of the ethnic identity may or may not be emphasized and active. It depends upon the circumstances. It is the particular economic, political, ecological, or social circumstances which determine the particular shape and strength of an ethnic identity and, indeed, if primordial elements are even a factor in defining group boundaries at all (Cohen 1969). And it is the circumstantial aspects of ethnicity which form the second axis of McKay’s matrix model (1982:404).

The circumstantial side of ethnicity can be observed in the interactions between groups and in the behaviour of group members. Since the boundaries which mark ethnic identities respond to changing circumstances it is at these boundaries where the processes of ethnicity are in action, as Barth (1969) has pointed out. Thus, if there are problems with access to political or economic resources or if the group has particular political and economic interests, then these may be the situations in which ethnic identities coalesce and where the distinctions between ethnic groups are drawn and expressed most clearly. The circumstantial aspect of ethnicity focuses on the issues around which ethnic identities become salient and change.

Scott (1990), following Spicer (1971), highlights this point in terms of opposition. The opposition between or among groups may crystallize around any number of issues, political, economic, social, or religious, depending upon the circumstances. In Scott’s view it is the opposition experienced subjectively which mobilizes a group to assert its identity in primordial terms and to define its distinctiveness over against another group (1990:162-166).

Thus, in the synthetic approach there are two poles to expressions of ethnicity. One axis is the primordial. A particular ethnic identity is expressed in terms of
cultural features which are said to be ancient and perceived to be \textit{a priori} characteristics by which its members define the group in distinction to other groups. On the other axis, ethnicity is circumstantial. An ethnic identity is expressed in varying intensity through the interactions of the group and its members with neighbouring groups as individuals are mobilized in response to issues which focus groups in opposition. Ethnicity is, therefore, a process.

Stephen Cornell (1996) recently has presented an argument for the variable character of ethnicity which is a slightly different statement of the focus we outline above for the integrative approach. He notes that the concentration of recent work on the circumstances or contexts in which ethnic boundaries were constructed has been "... invaluable in overcoming prevailing notions of the fixed and unchanging nature of ethnic identities..." (1996:266). We suggest also that both the circumstantial and integrative approaches improve upon an exclusively primordial approach. As well, Cornell points out the limitation of an exclusively circumstantial approach which, in his view, "makes it difficult to account for the tenacity with which some groups cling to identities which appear not to serve their 'objectively' determined interests" (1996:267). We too suggest that, at its extreme, an exclusively circumstantial approach can appear to result in an identity which is devoid of any content. An ethnic group can appear to be essentially the same as any interest group. The integrative approach is, in our view, the strongest theoretical position for understanding expressions of ethnicity and ethnic identity.

Cornell then suggests that in the body of work on the circumstantial approach, there are two emphases. These two aspects are, in our view, very similar to what we have described here as "primordial" and "circumstantial." First is found in the concentration of some studies on "... the external or situational factors — patterns of
political, economic, and social circumstances or relationships — that construct and
give significance to ethnic boundaries, and thereby give logic to ethnic group forma-
tion and persistence” (1996:266). This, in our view, is equivalent to the element of
ethnicity which we have described as primordial for it is ascriptive, external to the
members of the group, beyond their control, and expressed as a force which makes
the boundaries that define the group’s identity. As Cornell points out: “these forces
shape the ways people view themselves and their place in the world, and consequently
the identity claims they make” (1996:266).

The second emphasis he describes emerges from “the concern with boundary
construction” and it “has focused more on the response groups themselves make to cir-
cumstancial factors as they construct identities that suit their varied purposes”
(1996:266). This, we suggest, is equivalent to the element of ethnicity which we
have described above as circumstantial for it is responsive to the desires, strategies,
and goals of group members themselves as they adapt to changing circumstances.
Cornell suggests this aspect might be termed “constructionist” for it adds to ethnicity
“a creative component: ethnic groups become agents in their own construction, shap-
ing and reshaping their identities and the boundaries that enclose them out of the raw
materials of history, culture, and pre-existing ethnic constructions” (1996:266).

In Cornell’s view these two aspects must be taken together and seen as
modifiers of each other. He suggests that “they present a conception of ethnicity as a
contingent, volitional, negotiated phenomenon in which both societal circumstances
and the creative assertions of human groups play variable and interacting roles”
(1996:267). He thus integrates what Barth (1969) has termed the “stuff” of an ethnic
identity — the content of a particular expression of ethnicity that appears to be what
defines a group primordially — and the “external or circumstantial factors which play

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so large a role in the life cycles of those identities” (1996:267).

The integration of these two aspects of ethnic identity can be seen at two levels of analysis in Cornell’s view. One focuses on forces outside of the group, that is, on “those societal conditions and resultant positional interests that have encouraged, compelled, or inhibited organization along ethnic boundaries” (1996:266). This level is particularly amenable to historical analysis as it is the conditions at a specific point in time that supply the context and circumstances in which particular ethnic identities are formulated by the groups involved. If our work here were historical, this is the level on which our analysis would focus. We would analyze the “societal conditions” at the point in time portrayed by the stories of the major judges, either the time pictured by the stories themselves, or the time of the monarchic Deuteronomistic edition, or the time of the exilic Deuteronomistic edition. A clear description of these surrounding circumstances would further an understanding of Israelite ethnic identity. Indeed, as Cornell points out,

Ethnic groups are products of shared material interests, their own or others’, which themselves are products of particular historical circumstances or contexts. As circumstance or context changes, so does the calculus of ethnic identity claims and assignments, and likewise ethnic identity itself. Viewed in such terms ethnicity becomes, for the most part, a situationally-determined byproduct of more ‘fundamental’ forces (1996:266) (emphasis added).

The aim of an historical study, according to these parameters, would be to understand and describe the situational context and the forces shaping ethnic identity. For “the external environment — the structure of economic, political, and conceptual opportunities and constraints that group members face — fundamentally affects group formation” (1996:274).
However, our study in this thesis is directed at the second level of Cornell’s analytic framework. At this level the focus is “on the response groups themselves make to circumstantial factors as they construct identities that suit their varied purposes” (1996:266). We concentrate, therefore, on expressions of the ‘content’ of ethnic identities, that is, “on groups’ own assertions of just what ‘the stuff’ within the boundary actually is, and on the ways they use their cultural resources to affirm their distinctiveness and promote their interests” (1996:267).

This is the aim in this thesis of our examination of the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges. We will analyze the particular expressions of identity in these stories to see how, in the stories of the major judges, ethnic identity is constructed. If the integrative-synthetic approach we propose here is an appropriate model for understanding expressions of group ethnic identity, then we will expect to find the two faces of an ethnicity — primordial and circumstantial — revealed within the stories.

The integrative synthetic approach also answers the question of ethnogenesis. Jones and Hill’s (1982) study of the aboriginal folk of Australia illustrates the point. Like Taylor, Jones and Hill-Burnett examine the way in which a single pan-Aborigine ethnic group was created which cut across and homogenized what were previously diverse heterogeneous local groups or tribes. Their concern is with “...the process whereby a ‘common culture’ comes about and the manner by which it is defined” (1982:216). The point is that there are primordial elements in the group’s ethnic identity. Ancient Aboriginal traditions and symbols were used to define the identity of the new pan-Aborigine ethnic group. But the primordiality was defined and expressed in the context of particular circumstances. First, there was the influence of the Australian government, representatives of the dominating group who held more
political and economic power than the aboriginal population. This group sought to
develop policies and a rhetoric which would enable them to treat the Aborigines as a
homogeneous ethnic group. Second, within the aboriginal population itself there was
a great deal of debate over which cultural factors to use to define themselves and
which interests to pursue in the face of the imposed homogenization. This case
shows, as Jones and Hill-Burnett point out, that ethnicity “is a continuous process of
strategically negotiated identity and status” (1982:235). It has both a primordial pole
and a circumstantial pole and the way in which these two sides are developed depends
upon the character of the interaction and opposition within the group itself and with
surrounding groups.

The integrative synthetic approach provides the theory for this study and is the
basis for the interpretive model we will apply to the stories of the major judges. It is
our contention that the two poles of ethnicity, primordial and circumstantial, are
expressed in the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges and we will seek to
identify elements which are indicative of each. This will demonstrate that expressions
of group identity do not depend solely on primordial a priori, natural, categorical, or
static distinctions between insider and outsider, but that expressions of group identity,
like the identity itself, describe fluidity, the social construction of identity, and depict
changing circumstances which influence identity. Expressions of identity thus use a
rhetoric of primordiality but in a particular context in order to justify particular argu-
ments about group identity in the particular situation. A group’s identity is, there-
fore, not the result of “natural” divisions within human society. Rather, it is a prod-
uct of collective social action that uses the language of primordiality to support
specific claims for cohesion or separation in changing circumstances. As Cornell
points out, ethnic groups are “agents in their own construction, shaping and reshaping
their identities and the boundaries that enclose them out of the raw materials of history, culture, and pre-existing ethnic constructions" (1966:266). Ethnic groups are not static or immutable facts which remain unaffected by interactions with other groups or by debate and dialogue within their boundaries. Rather, ethnic groups can change their definition and character in response to changing circumstances on both sides of their defining boundaries. The stories of the major judges depict this fluidity. They contain portrayals of situations where ethnic group identities are expressed both by referring to or by implying primordial differences and by describing situations which show the identities being defined in the context of particular circumstances.
REPRESENTATIVE VIEWS ON ISRAELITE ETHNIC IDENTITY
Representative Views on Israelite Ethnic Identity

Introduction

Despite the recent popularity of ethnicity and ethnic relations in studies of ancient Israel, no one in the field of biblical studies has undertaken a systematic examination of anthropological theory on ethnic identity, ethnic groups, or ethnicity or assessed its potential for studies of biblical literature or historiography. We have addressed the anthropological side of ethnicity in the previous chapter. Equally unfortunate to the lack of attention given to anthropological theory, and perhaps resulting in part from the lack of theoretical and epistemological awareness, is the tendency for the terms to be used in an ad hoc manner which reflects more the assumptions and unexamined presuppositions of the scholars who use them than any clear theoretical understanding. Even those who have followed an explicitly social scientific approach to the Bible have tended to begin with the historical-critical method and have asked historical questions of the text without first clarifying how they are treating ethnicity (see, for example, Wilson 1977; 1979; 1980; Rogerson 1984; Lang 1985). In our view, this lack of epistemological exactness and clarity about ethnic groups, ethnic identity, and ethnicity is problematic. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how some prominent historians of Israelite identity have used the term “ethnicity” and to illustrate their often unstated theoretical positions and assumptions about ethnicity and ethnic groups. This will demonstrate the general lack of epistemological and theoretical awareness that has been present in studies which use the concept ethnicity in discussions of group identity.

As many who discuss Israelite identity assume that ethnicity is an issue of origins, most who have addressed the topic have treated it is an historical problem and
have considered it in the context of the pre-state history of Israel. Their approach has been to reconstruct what they see as the history of Israelite identity rather than to examine expressions of group identity *per se*. Our discussion here will examine the work of a number of such scholars whose work is representative of approaches to ethnicity. It will be divided into four sections. The first three are defined by the three classic scholarly views about the emergence of Israelite identity. The first deals with those writers who described Israel’s emergence as a process of “conquest,” the second examines those who explained it in terms of an “immigration,” and the third treats writers who expressed it as a process of “revolt.” We will not discuss the details or evaluate the relative merits and weaknesses of these three models in any depth as this has been done by others more adequately elsewhere.\(^\text{20}\) The fourth section discusses the work of some recent writers who do not fall into one of the three traditional explanatory categories but who do discuss the process by which Israel achieved its collective identity.

Until the work of G.E. Mendenhall and N.K. Gottwald, the generally accepted view of the disruptions at the end of the late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age was that outside groups, pre-formed “packages” of people, caused the turmoil when they moved into the region from other areas.\(^\text{21}\) This perspective is most prominent in the work of scholars who viewed the Israelites as conquerors. We will

\(^{20}\) For a good discussion and critique of the classic views on the emergence of Israel see N.P. Lemche (1985), and his detailed analysis and evaluation of the conquest theorists as represented especially by W.F. Albright (1985:48-62), the immigration theorists as exemplified by A. Alt and M. Noth (1985:35-48), and the work of the revolt theorists G.E. Mendenhall and N.K. Gottwald (1985:1-34). See also the summary of opposing views in Gottwald (1979) and in Halpern (1983b), the evaluation of Weippert (1971), and the summary of Hess (1993).

\(^{21}\) For an example of this type of argument see the work of E.A. Speiser (1933; 1960; 1962).
examine the views of W.F. Albright, Kathleen Kenyon, and John Bright.

**Conquest Theorists**

Perhaps the foremost statement of the "conquest" position is found in the work of William F. Albright (1935; 1939; 1963). Albright argued that the biblical tradition of a unified military conquest and invasion by Israel was historically accurate. In his view the Israelites were outsiders, invaders, and conquerors. They were not, as Alt and Noth suggested, nomads following a typical pattern of transition from a wandering to a sedentary lifestyle either through raiding or gradual infiltration (1963:30-31).

Albright argued, however, that although the Israelites were invaders, the "conquest" of the Palestinian hill country in the early Iron Age was the culmination of a long process of movement which began much earlier. The first stages were to be found in the activity of Amorites early in the second millennium (Albright 1963:7). In his view, Abraham and the ancestors described in the Genesis traditions were a part of this movement (Albright 1963:2). Indeed, he argued that "among the Hebrew groups first settled in Palestine, whose migration from Mesopotamia probably goes back to the late Patriarchal Age, presumably well after 1700 B.C.E., were several extinct clans of Judah and Benjamin" (Albright 1973:48). By this point then, the mid-second millennium, Albright felt that the people who eventually would become Israel already had a distinct identity.

Furthermore, he suggested that by the late Bronze Age there was already a large early Hebrew presence in the central hill country and that the Israelites, as Hebrews, were related to the 'apiru of the Amarna texts (Albright 1963:26,32). However, he also maintained that the 'apiru were a class, not an ethnic group and not socially or
economically homogeneous (1963:26). Thus, the people whom he might have called “proto-Israel” came from mixed social circumstances. In Albright’s view, early Iron Age Israel reflected a diverse background with the population containing elements who had experience both as Egyptian “state serfs” and as ‘apiru “caravaneers and freebooters” (1963: 35). Nonetheless, he felt that during the period of conquest it was “. . . only natural that most of the Hebrews in Palestine should join the newcomers from Egypt. It would also be natural for men of Judah to seek out relatives in the southern hill-country and for men of Joseph to join their tribal kindred in the central hill-country” (Albright 1963:33). He claimed that in spite of their social diversity there was still an element binding them all together and he seemed to suggest, with the mention of “relatives,” that the ties were kin-based. Such kin ties are a feature of an ethnic identity and imply that this was the way Albright conceived of them, although he did not use the term explicitly.

By the time of the Judges, Albright suggested that the tribes of Israel, although related as kin, were socially distinct groups unified, not only by kinship, but also by their worship at a central sanctuary which provided a common belief system, political unity, and enabled the development of a common language and common customs (1963:36). Indeed, ultimately it was their religion, the Mosaic law carried by the missionizing Israelite invaders to Hebrew kin and to the native Canaanite population, which pulled and held them all together (Albright 1956:99; 1963:37-38). However, offsetting the unifying forces of Israelite religion, were the strong traditions of indigenous Canaanite religion characterized by the worship of Baal (Albright 1963:38). The result was that social and religious heterogeneity remained the dominant characteristic of the area until the monarchy.
In summary, Albright’s picture of early Israelite identity was somewhat confused. Although he did not articulate it clearly, it seems to us that he was beginning to see by the end of his career that the issue of early Israelite identity was neither clear nor simple. On the one hand he argued that the Israelites constituted a distinct population group which had existed in the hills of Palestine since the end of the early Bronze Age. Their descendants were still there in the late Bronze Age as ‘apiru or Hebrews. On the other hand, he argued that the ‘apiru were more a class than an ethnic group. However, he argued that the Israelites, those who fled Egypt as part of the exodus group, joined with others of their kin who were ‘apiru when they arrived in Palestine. The force of their experience and the zeal with which they worshipped Yahweh provided a powerful force for unifying these related but disparate people.

Kathleen Kenyon, like W.F. Albright, held the classic view that the Israelites entered the land of Palestine by conquest. She also connected the Amarna ‘apiru with the Hebrews, thus implying that there was some kind of general and early Israelite presence in the land before the Iron Age (Kenyon 1985:204). She suggested that the Israelite group itself, however, entered the area from outside as different tribes. Kenyon argued there were three main groups: a northern and Transjordanian group that did not participate in the Exodus, a group expelled from Egypt that entered the land from the south, and finally a group that fled Egypt and entered the land from the east (1985:205).

Kenyon assumed that these Israelites, although related both to the ‘apiru who presumably had remained in the land and to the northern group that did not experience a time in Egypt, would be indicated archaeologically by the destructions they had wrought on some indigenous settlements and by the appearance of a new culture (1985:205). However, she immediately discounted the likelihood of ever finding dis-
tinctive material culture since, in her view, the migrating tribes would not have carried with them durable items which would survive in the archaeological record. Furthermore, she suggested that such nomadic outsiders would have adopted the material culture of the indigenous sedentary population as they adopted the new lifestyle and the “deterioration in culture” which was one of the indicators of the transition from the late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age, was a reflection of the process of migration and sedentarization (Kenyon 1985:206). The destruction evidence was problematic too. She discussed the destruction levels at Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish, Jericho, 'Ai, and Hazor and suggested that, at best, they indicated only the turmoil of the time (Kenyon 1985:207).

But even in the early Iron Age, when according to her model presumably all the Israelite groups were established in the land, Kenyon still could find little archaeological evidence for them. She suggested that this was because of the nature of the archaeological record, poor and thin deposits often disturbed by the work of later builders, and because their material culture was “yet primitive” (Kenyon 1985:230). In addition she suggested that,

The period is undoubtedly that in which the national consciousness of the Israelites is developing greatly. The biblical narrative shows how the groups were gradually combining together, with tentative efforts at temporal unification under the Judges and the stronger spiritual link of a national religion, with the high priest at times exercising temporal power. It is during these centuries that the groups allied by race, but differing in the manner and time of the settlement in Palestine, . . . must have come to combine their ancestral traditions together under the influence of the Yahwehistic religion, and to believe that all their ancestors took part in the Exodus. (Kenyon 1985:230)
Kenyon’s assumptions are very clear in this passage. She acknowledged that the group of people who eventually came to be identified collectively as “Israel” had come into the land in a variety of ways from a variety of backgrounds and that in this period they were still in the process of forming their collective “national” identity. They were held together at times by a “Judge” and at times, just as Albright argued, by their religion. However, despite the diversity in their manner of settlement, Kenyon assumed that these disparate groups were united by “race.” Although she did not explain this term, it is clear that she used it in a way that is synonymous with “ethnicity” or at least a racial understanding of ethnicity. However, this racial unity was assumed a priori and unfortunately she presented no data or theory to support this particular point.

We may summarize Kenyon’s position as follows. She, like Albright, argued that the Israelites were a heterogeneous group made up of smaller groups, which she identified as tribes, some of whom had fled Egypt and some of whom had remained on the Eastern side of the Jordan River. Once these people were established in the hills of central Palestine, she argued, again like Albright, that their religion was a major factor holding the disparate groups together. Moreover, and more significantly for this study, she suggested that they were related racially. This position seems to be based on the view that the ‘apiru of the late Bronze Age were the Hebrew ancestors of the Iron Age Israelites. She assumes that race and kinship or, blood, relations were what united the people under a common identity.

John Bright, one of Albright’s students, is the third scholar of the “conquest” position we will examine. He argued, as did Kenyon and Albright, that the earliest ancestral traditions of Israel were situated historically in the movement of Northwest Semitic speaking Amorites at the end of the Early Bronze period (Bright 1981:95).
Thus, in his view, throughout the Middle and Late Bronze periods there was a nascent Israelite presence in Palestine.

By the end of the late Bronze Age and the time of the turmoil revealed in the Amarna texts, Bright suggested there was at least the possibility for some kind of equation between Hebrew and ‘apiru although he does not see it as a necessity. He, like Albright, saw the ‘apiru as a social class and not as an ethnic group (Bright 1981:93-95). In addition, Bright wrote that “men of various races and languages might be ‘Apiuru” (Bright 1981:95), thus implying that ethnic distinctions might have been maintained despite a certain social unity. We should note in this passage that Bright assumed that the ethnic distinctions which were retained were indicated by what he calls “race” and “language.” This also implies that the Israelites, or Hebrews, might not necessarily have been part of the ‘apiru social movement and that they might have maintained a distinctive identity which was determined, at least in part, by a unique “race” and “language.” It is unfortunate, however, that Bright does not go any further in defining explicitly what he meant for the Israelites by these two terms.

This is made even more confusing because Bright also suggests that “we are not to suppose that the entity we call Israel was formed and held together in the face of adversity exclusively, or even, primarily, through ties of blood kinship (Bright 1981:163). Thus, he wrote:

Israel — both those parts of it that had come from the desert and those parts already present in Palestine who entered into its structure — included elements of the most heterogeneous origin who could not possibly have descended from a single family tree. . . . And, on the other hand, it was never her bloodstream, her racial stock or her language, that set Israel off from her immediate neigh-
bors (Canaanites, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, etc.), but rather the tradition (or, if one prefers, the ideology) to which she was committed. Speaking theologically, one might with justice call Israel a family; but from a historical point of view neither her first appearance nor her continued existence can be accounted for in terms of blood kinship (Bright 1981:163).

In his view, it was the religion of Yahwism which drew and unified these disparate people together. Once established in the land, and in the period which was portrayed by the book of Judges, Bright suggests that it was generally a time of turmoil and disunity. However, in his view it was the Israelite religion which brought the group together, not in a gradual way but as a catalyst: “The only really satisfying explanation is that it must have come about through some solemn ceremony of ‘mass conversion’ like the great covenant at Shechem described in Josh. ch.24” (Bright 1981:165).

In any case, the point for our study is that Bright argued that the population of Israel at this point was mixed. Some were people who had lived as slaves in Egypt and escaped to this new land and some were indigenous Canaanites. They were united by their poverty as well as their religion. But, according to Bright, even the religion was not entirely unified at this stage and elements of the indigenous Canaanite religious practices and beliefs were in tension with the new Israelite religion (Bright 1981:178).

We may summarize Bright’s view in the following manner. Israelite identity had its root in the early Bronze Age and was manifested in the movement of the Amorites. Israelite identity was well established by the late Bronze Age, although the Israelites could not be equated explicitly with the ‘apiru. There is some confusion on this point but Bright seems to imply that the Israelites did have a distinct identity, one which could be termed an ethnic identity, with distinct racial and linguistic traits.
However, the Israelite group was also characterized by much disunity and it was the religion of Yahwism which held the disparate people together.22

In summary of this first section, the conquest theorists all assume that Israelite identity was established and in place by the time the people took control of the land in the early Iron Age. The ultimate root of the group, or perhaps “genesis” is more appropriate, was to be found in the migrations of the Amorites at the end of the early Bronze Age. The ‘apiru, a group identified in the Amarna letters of the late Bronze Age, was a key element in the population of this area. These writers all suggested, however, that the ‘apiru constituted more a social class than an ethnic group, in contrast to the Israelites who did constitute a distinct ethnic group. For all three writers, the most significant feature of Israelite ethnicity was the religion of Yahweh worship. This, together with the ties of kinship and blood, is what provided the glue which cemented the somewhat heterogeneous population together.

In terms of the anthropological theory of ethnicity discussed earlier, these writers all take a primordial perspective. In their view, the ethnic identity of Israel was an established fact, pre-determined by kin or race relations with roots as far back as the early Bronze Age. And although the group's membership may have changed somewhat with the conquest of the land or have been influenced by the application of a covenant with a deity, the fundamental ethnic identity was already formed and established by the time the core of the group arrived in the area and certainly by the

22 Note that Bright's ideas on Israel's formative period changed under the influence of Mendenhall whom he credits in the third edition of his History of Israel (1981:133:n.69). Nonetheless, although his more recent discussion allows for more fluidity in the development of Israelite identity that it did in the second edition of his History of Israel (1972), he continues to emphasize the importance of the movement of an earlier population into the region and the religion of Yahwism for the identity of Israel.
period described in the book of Judges.

Thus, in the view of these scholars, the interactions and relations between groups and their representatives which are described in biblical texts such as the stories of the major judges, are historically accurate depictions of relations between historical ethnic units which were defined and created at earlier points in time. Ethnic identity is the result of primordial events and the locus of ethnicity is in the past. Thus, in the view of these scholars, the interactions and relations between groups and their representatives described in texts such as Judges are not indicative of any continuing process of ethnic definition and expression. New circumstances presented challenges to a group with an already established identity but did not bring about change to that group's ethnicity.

Immigration Theorists

We turn now to the views of scholars who held that the Israelites appeared in the land through a process of gradual infiltration and immigration. In discussions of the history of the Israelites in the early Iron Age, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth are best known for the theory that Israel settled in territory in between lands traditionally under the domination or control of the city states of the late Bronze Age.

Alt's approach might be described as environmental in that he focused on the territorial and geographic divisions he saw as being present in the land well before the Iron Age. He consciously sought to turn discussion away from the people "Israel" to the "more constant factor" of territory (1966:136). The result of this approach was the theory that the Israelites settled more or less peacefully in territories outside the control of the city states and did not arrive as vigorous conquerors.
Alt’s focus on territories did not speak directly to the issue of ethnicity and the identity of the Israelites. However, it is possible and useful to examine the assumptions he makes about their identity.

First, Alt situated his whole discussion in a context which he described as “the time of the migrations and the settlement . . .” (1966:135). Indeed, he states that: “It is obvious that in a country where men have dwelt for a long time, settlement by invading tribes will not only have a powerful effect on the way of life of both the former inhabitants and the newcomers, but will also have a substantial effect on the country itself” (1966:126). Alt obviously saw the Israelites as having a distinct tribal identity which distinguished them from the indigenous people of the area. The Israelites were outsiders and newcomers. Their invasion brought about clear changes in the region.

He summarizes his account of the Israelite occupation of the land by reiterating how the Israelites settled in areas in between regions controlled strongly by the city states, that is, in the mountains. These areas, in his view, “. . . were least capable of resisting the advance of the Israelites, and offered them the best opportunity of settling down and gradually turning from their semi-nomadic way of life to an agricultural economy” (1966:168).

Alt suggests in a section analyzing the Israelite settlement which deals with the situation in the land after the settlement of the people, that the indigenous people sought to maintain the traditional situation. He cites Judges 1 as an indication of this motivation to maintain the status quo. Therefore, the changes brought about in the Iron Age could not have come from the indigenous population (1966:158). Indeed, Alt finds support for this analysis “. . . by the fact that the new states were all named after tribes and peoples who had played no part in the earlier history of the country,
and indeed had only just settled there—Philistines, Israelites, Judeans, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Arameans” (1966:158). Furthermore, that these new Iron Age states were named after distinct groups of people indicates to him that these groups had a “national consciousness” which the earlier city-states could not have had themselves. In keeping with his geographic analysis, Alt suggests there is a correlation between the extent of the territory claimed by these new states and the area which people belonging to the same group actually settled.

In addition, Alt suggests that Judges 1 indicates that the outsider Israelites were only able to control certain portions of the land and that the cities of the coast remained essentially independent. Later on, under pressure from the Philistines, Alt argues that Israel “... needed to renounce the stern ideal of national purity and concentrate on bringing about territorial unity ...” (1966:161). By this he seems to be implying that the Israelites already had a collective identity based on a “national purity.” This is as close as he comes to speaking directly of race or ethnicity. The argument he makes at this point is that Israel shifted from a “national” state to a “territorial” state under David. Thus, the new kingdom of Israel came to include the old city states the population of which was not “pure” Israelite as well as the in between areas settled by the original “pure” Israelites. Alt calls this “an internal revolution, from a state distinguished simply by nationality to a compact area within fixed territorial boundaries, and consequently without such a firm national unity” (1966:163).

In his analysis of the situation between the Late Bronze city states and the period of kingship, Alt suggests that one factor in tribal unity, at least as regards settlement pattern, was genealogical relationships. He describes these groups as “... those which were united either because they settled next to one another, or because
they were united as son to mother by the relationship of their ancestors" (1966:166). Thus, kinship seems to be one of the identifying factors Alt emphasizes for indicating Israelite ethnicity.

We may summarize the views of Alt by noting two points in particular. First, Alt assumed that the Israelites were a distinct people with a distinct identity and that they entered the land as “outsiders” with respect to the indigenous population. He does not go beyond this, however, in trying to seek the original root of the Israelite population. They are, he assumes, nomads but he does not try to situate them in the movement of the Amorites, for example. The second point to note is that Alt views genealogy as the key identifying ethnic characteristic. The Israelites tribes were related to each other just as were the nomadic Arab tribes of Alt’s own day.

We turn now to the work of Martin Noth who, like Alt, saw the Israelites as outsiders, semi-nomadic herders, people who had entered and settled the central mountainous region at a particular point in time (1983:3,69). Both scholars focused on the tribes of Israel as the basic units involved in this process, but whereas Alt focused on the geographic regions inhabited by the tribes, Noth focused on the history of the tribes as preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

The key point for us is that Noth argued that the tribes gained their collective identity only over a long period of time after they independently settled the region (1983:53,69). Thus the tribes may not have been completely unified at the time they first began to settle down in the hill country. He suggested that their relationships may have been quite fluid and volatile before they settled and that it was only after they had lived together for some time that the collective tribal identities coalesced (1983:72).
He suggested that the tradition of the tribes collectively settling into the land as a unified group is a biblical one dating to a period much later than the time it describes. In Noth's view it is this tradition which "... thinks of the tribes and the whole of Israel as having arisen by propagation and ramification from the family of a common ancestor and having formed a unity based on blood relationship from time immemorial and being bound together by a common destiny" (1983:71). This would seem to suggest that Noth felt that a collective Israelite "ethnic" identity was not yet active when the Israelites first entered the land.

However, Noth also suggests by the use of the terms "propagation," "family," and "ancestor," that kinship undoubtedly was important to the collective identity of the group. The blood relationships so prominent in the narratives of Israel's early history which he suggests date to a later period, nonetheless must have had some basis in reality. So, on the one hand the tradition about a united and kin-based large extended family group entering the land as a unit is not an accurate representation of historical reality. But, on the other hand, there were real and significant kin relationships. Noth does not suggest how to distinguish between the fictive and actual kin relationships described in the Hebrew Bible.

Noth also states that there were particular historically determined circumstances which brought "more or less related" clans together to form a tribe. Similar kinds of circumstances brought the tribes together into a "tribal confederation" (1966:72).

Noth's discussion of these points indicates that he is aware, perhaps intuitively, of the flexibility of ethnic processes, even though he does not use the term specifically or elaborate further on the theory of group identity. Yet it is interesting to note that he recognizes that the kin relationships described in the Bible may have born little resemblance to actual kin relationships and that much of what brought disparate clan
and tribal groups together into a unified Israel were common circumstances. This perspective has much in common with modern theories of ethnicity, as we have already seen.

The circumstances Noth envisioned are found in the general assumption he makes about the propensity for semi-nomadic groups to move into arable land and to take up permanent sedentary residence. In Noth’s view, it was the individual family and clan groups who were the basic units of this movement. As they found themselves in similar circumstances in the central hill country they then developed a unified identity as they came to find they had much in common (1983:72).

Indeed, the Israelites had much in common with other people who, according to Noth, were also moving in from the desert fringe to arable areas, notably the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites to the East (1983:83). These groups together with the Israelites were all part of a movement of Aramean people around the fertile crescent. Nonetheless, he maintains that the Israelites were distinct from these neighbouring groups, as “clans” which did not form themselves into tribes until they began to live in Palestine (1983:72).

In addition, Noth maintains there were fundamental distinctions between the Israelites and the Canaanites. It is interesting to note that Noth suggests there were *ethnic* differences within the general Canaanite population (1983:141). But he does not elaborate further his use of this word. However, he does describe how the Israelites were quite distinct from the Canaanites and he suggests that these distinctions were based ultimately on the different circumstances from which the Israelites had come (1983:142). He argued that the differences are rooted primarily in the distinction between the rural Israelite farmers and herders on the one hand and the urban Canaanites on the other.
The distinctions Noth points out are in a number of areas. In terms of social structure, the Israelites had an egalitarian tribal organization while Canaanite social structure was stratified (1983:142). In terms of military organization, the Israelites were a militia while the Canaanites had a chariot army. The most important distinction, however, was in the area of religion. The Canaanites practiced a polytheistic fertility cult while the Israelites were monotheistic and apparently opposed to fertility religious practices (1983:142-144).

Although Noth was wrong in his assumption that semi-nomadic peoples have a natural desire to settle permanently in well-watered agricultural regions and in his thesis that once in the land the Israelites organized themselves as an amphictyony (Ahlström 1986), he was very likely correct in his assumption that there was a certain fluidity in the early identity of the group.

The work of Alt and Noth best exemplifies the position of the scholars who viewed the Israelites as a distinct group who entered the highlands of Palestine from outside, not as conquerors but as immigrants. Both suggest that the newcomers were united primarily by kinship. Accompanying this idea was the further notion that these groups were essentially nomadic and bound up with this nomadic identity was the view that there was a "natural" and perhaps even evolutionary propensity for such people to settle down and to become sedentary, a natural step on the evolutionary path to civilization. Before settling in the highlands the Israelite tribes were nomadic and "primitive" but once established in the central highlands they became settled and "civilized" (Mendenhall 1973:21).

As with the conquest theorists, ethnicity is a given for the immigration theorists. In their view, the migrating groups have a distinct and well-established ethnic identity based primarily on the ties of kinship. Alt and Noth do suggest that there is some
fluidity in group membership. Nonetheless, implicit in their discussion is the view that the ethnic identity of Israel was already established before the group appeared in the land. Their views thus represent a primordialist perspective. Like the conquest theorists these writers also present the source of ethnic identity as somewhere in the past. They do not view interactions and relations between groups as indicative of ongoing processes of ethnic definition but rather they present them as the result of primordial distinctions between the groups involved.

Internal Revolt Theorists

George E. Mendenhall was the first to suggest that the situation might be otherwise. In his view, the Israelites emerged from the indigenous population of the land after the collapse at the end of the late Bronze Age. If this was so, then the Israelites could not a priori have been a distinct ethnic group. In order to claim this, Mendenhall had to have a different understanding of ethnicity than either the conquest theorists or immigration theorists.

He suggested that “reconstructing the picture will be possible at all only by systematic rejection of the idea that the formative period of Israel represents a totally new culture unrelated to anything in the past” (Mendenhall 1973:14). Indeed, “there was no such thing as an ethnic group of “Israelites” in this early period” (Mendenhall 1973:27).

Mendenhall was also the first scholar working on the question of the identity of early Israel to make explicit some sort of definition or theory of ethnicity. His understanding was apparently based (1973:11) solely on E.R. Service’s *Primitive Social Organization* (1962). He thus missed most of the burgeoning literature on eth-
nicity which appeared after Service’s work. Mendenhall’s theoretical understanding was therefore one-sided and did not take into account the nuances which were beginning to appear in the discussion at the time he was writing. Nonetheless, he did make some statement about his particular theoretical perspective.

Following Service, Mendenhall stated that “ethnic solidarity is essentially a matter of allegiance to a tradition in a continuity” (Mendenhall 1973:11). He stated further that “the observation of the allegiance to a tradition at a given time must be kept quite distinct from the historical problem of origins, even though the allegiance tends always to be based in a religion that appeals to the past as the ground and precedent for that which is at some particular later period” (Mendenhall 1973:11). Elsewhere, in a discussion on the archaeological identification of ethnicity, he wrote that “ethnic identity is a function of personal relationships and interests, combined with such similarities of language, culture, and religious value systems as well as geographical origins, as make new functional social organizations possible” (Mendenhall 1973:149-150).

It is clear that Mendenhall sees ethnic configurations as depending primarily on the exigencies of particular situations. It is interpersonal and dependent on interests. The commonalities of language, culture, and religion join with geographic rootedness to make different social organizations. This is most decidedly not a perspective which views ethnic configurations as static and based on essential or primordial traditions.

Mendenhall disassociated ethnicity from race and from the categories of blood, language, and geography, features which earlier scholars assumed were the essentials of an ethnic identity. Indeed, as we have seen, the scholars who viewed ethnicity in this way thus saw the Israelites as outsiders who brought a new culture and identity into the land when they arrived. It was usually assumed that these newcomers were
nomads with a distinct ethnic identity. Mendenhall vigorously repudiated this. He stated: “the old idea of one ethnic group’s moving in to displace or destroy a predecessor which then promptly disappears is based upon most unsophisticated notions that cannot be too thoroughly repudiated” (Mendenhall 1973:14).

As with earlier scholars, however, Mendenhall also asks where the Israelite distinctive identity came from. And like earlier scholars he considers the ‘apiru question. At the beginning of his discussion he states very clearly that “It is now agreed by nearly all scholars that the term ‘upiteru originally had no ethnic significance, but rather designated a social or political status” (Mendenhall 1973:122). ‘Apiru were people who were outside of any legal connection with the city states of the late Bronze Age, not controlled, obligated, or protected by the king.

As for the relationship of the ‘apiru to the Hebrews, Mendenhall suggests that ’apiru was indeed a term applied to the Israelites. He argues that Israelite tradition preserves a history of “refusal by villagers and shepherds to become assimilated to the existing political organizations in whose environs they lived” (Mendenhall 1973:137). But it was much later, during the monarchy, that “the term ‘upiteru ceased to be a politicolegal term and became an “ethnic” designation in addition to the proper name for the religious federation, Bere She'a’el” (Mendenhall 1973:137).

He thus is arguing that Israelite ethnic identity developed through a slow process against the background of the dissolution of the late Bronze Age city state system. There were no migrations of ethnically “pure” tribes out of the desert (Mendenhall 1973:144). The gentilics used in scholarly arguments to identify members of different ethnic groups or races are not valid, according to Mendenhall. In his view, the gentilics are based either on place names, political organizations, or those solidarity and interest groups now called tribes (Mendenhall 1973:155).
Ultimatey, according to Mendenhall, religion was the key linking factor in the case of Israel. In his view: “early Israel was the dominion of Yahweh, consisting of all those diverse lineages, clans, individuals, and other social segments that, under the covenant, had accepted the rule of Yahweh and simultaneously had rejected the domination of the various local kings and their tutelary deities—the baalim” (Mendenhall 1973:28-29). Israel was made up of a great diversity of smaller units as is indicated by the variety of names for these groups (Mendenhall 1973:181). In addition, the biblical story of Moses leading a diverse collection of people out of Egypt indicates to Mendenhall that there was no ethnic unity in early Israel (Mendenhall 1973:225). It is, therefore, “a confusion in terminology to speak of the ‘Israelites’ as an ethnic group during the biblical period. Israel is the designation of a religious community, of a large social organization, that constituted the Kingdom of God” (Mendenhall 1973:224).

The ethnic unity of Israel was only later defined. Indeed, he suggests that it was not until the Persian period when Ezra and Nehemiah decreed that marriage of non-Jews was taboo that finally “ethnicity or race was the foundation of the religious community and the basis of individual identity” (Mendenhall 1973:226).

But Mendenhall takes the point further to argue that it is a fallacy to describe any of these ancient peoples as ethnic groups. This reveals Mendenhall’s rather narrow understanding of ethnicity. For him it is linked closely to the idea of race and, indeed, he may be seeing the two terms as essentially interchangeable (note above his equation of “ethnicity” with “race”). He criticizes scholars who speak “with such facility” of ancient groups of people as ethnic groups or races and argues that “. . . there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ ethnic group in any historical social organization of considerable extent, and such racist ideas must be expunged from the conceptual bag-
gage of the historian" (Mendenhall 1973:220). Indeed, he suggests that the historians who explained the changes between the major historical periods in the ancient Near East as being due to invasions and migrations of different population groups held a deep and unconscious "racial bias" (Mendenhall 1973:216).

Once Mendenhall turned the focus of new research to the complex processes of change and development which led to the growth and emergence of Israel out of the indigenous peoples of Palestine, a number of other works since his have looked closely at this process. Foremost among these is the monumental work of Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.* (1979).

Although Gottwald does not discuss the theory of ethnicity it is possible to reach something of an understanding through a close reading of his work. The model which Gottwald presents, popularly known as the revolt model, suggests that the Israelites emerged, at least in part, from the indigenous population of Canaan.

Like Mendenhall and the other scholars we have examined, Gottwald considered the identity of the 'apiru to be an important issue in understanding the identity of the early Israelites. He suggested that "while they work at many activities and seem to be ethnically mixed, the 'apiru are characterized everywhere by their negative stance toward the existing social and political structures" (Gottwald 1979:213). In his view, then, the 'apiru were not an ethnic group but a socio-political class (Gottwald 1979:401).

But how do the 'apiru relate to the terms "Hebrews" and "Israelites" in Gottwald's view? They are, in his view, ethnically synonymous. Focusing on passages in 1 Samuel 13-14 with 'ibrim, Gottwald points out that the term is used in two ways: when in the mouths of the Philistines it can be equated with Israelites but when in the
mouths of the Israelites it denotes 'apiru (Gottwald 1979:419-420). With this approach, Gottwald suggests “Hebrew” has a sociopolitical meaning rather than an ethnic meaning. To the Philistines, the Israelites were like the Canaanite 'apiru. Both were groups of people they wished to dominate and both were people who, for their part, tried to maintain autonomy against the claims of the Philistine city states. Therefore, the Philistines called the Israelites 'apiru. The Israelites, on the other hand, used 'ibrîm for those people, Israelite or non-Israelite, who offered 'apiru service to the Philistines, that is, those who were mercenaries (Gottwald 1979:421-425).

In other words, Gottwald argues against an ethnic understanding of 'apiru and 'ibrîm. It not only renders plausible the different senses of “Hebrews” when used, on the one hand, by the Philistines for all Israelites as their subjects and, on the other hand, by the Israelite speaker or narrator to designate Israelite or non-Israelite elements giving 'apiru service. It also shows that not all combatants were firmly locked into the Philistine or Israelite camps; some wavered between the two opposing forces. (Gottwald 1979:424-425)

Gottwald’s argument reveals something of his understanding of ethnicity. His contention that 'apiru are not an ethnic group allows him to argue that 'apiru and 'ibrîm are simply different terms for essentially the same group of people. The two uses of 'ibrîm in 1 Sam 13-14 reflect this variation. However, if the terms were distinct ethnic labels the two terms would have to refer to two different groups of people. But because Gottwald maintains the two terms refer to a single sociopolitical class then there is no distinction between them in terms of ethnicity.

This would seem to imply clearly that the Hebrews or Israelites can be equated with the 'apiru. However, Gottwald does not make this equation unequivocally. In fact, he maintains still that there is some distinctiveness about Israelites, although he
does not define it. Thus there is a distinction between Israelites and Hebrews.

"Hebrews' is here used as a differentiating term, either for non-Israelites or for some Israelites viewed in a particular way" (Gottwald 1978:422). Hebrews are thus sociopolitically distinct from Israelites proper, either as ‘apiru or as Hebrew Israelites. Although he does not state it, presumably Gottwald would maintain that this sociopolitical distinction would not extend to an ethnic distinctiveness. However, neither does he go so far as to state unequivocally that the Israelites were ‘apiru. He does maintain a distinction between Israelites and Hebrews in this section of the book.

He explains this with a bit more clarity elsewhere. He argues that Israel was both continuous and discontinuous with the earlier ‘apiru. It was continuous in the sense that the ‘apiru first gained independence and then strength as bands and “cultic-sociopolitical-military” groups with a common religion centered on the worship of the deity El. It was discontinuous in the sense that Israel was an expanded association including ‘apiru, Shosu, peasants, and pastoralists from Canaan and Egypt united with a common religion centered on the worship of the deity Yahweh (Gottwald 1979:496-497).

How, then, did Gottwald understand Israelite ethnicity? His major point is that Israel was not a homogeneous group from the beginning. He argued that ‘apiru, peasants, and pastoralists, all of whom had been integrated to a greater or lesser degree into the city-state system of the late Bronze Age, were now in the early Iron Age part of the mix that became Israel. “Consequently, Israel is most appropriately conceived as an eclectic composite in which various underclass and outlaw elements of society joined their diffused antifeudal experiences, sentiments, and interests, thereby forming a single movement that, through trial and error, became an effective autonomous social system” (Gottwald 1979:491). Elsewhere he writes: “the coalesc-
ing Yahwists were astonishingly diverse ethnically and culturally, but they had common social and political experiences and were forging together a common life of mutual defense and self-development” (Gottwald 1979:215).

The grouping was based more on common interests than on any other factors. Gottwald describes it this way:

this eclecticism of converging, but in many ways diverse, social elements posed a precarious unity which can in no way be accounted for in terms of prior ethnic or cultural factors. Only the long process of social struggle in Canaan, which step by step induced an agonizingly slow emergence of common consciousness among the oppressed peoples, can account for the integration and focus of the new community of Israel (Gottwald 1979:491).

Israel’s ethnic identity was formed in the particular situation and circumstances at the end of the late Bronze Age.

Gottwald is clear in his view that Israel was not a primordially stable or essential ethnic unit which entered the land from outside with a pre-formed identity.

Israel was a mutation of major proportions **within** Canaan, and its mutant reality as a social system must not be confused with a monolithic ethnic identity, a monolithic socioeconomic pastoral nomadic identity, or a monolithic religious identity as if, somehow, Israel’s mutational significance could be accounted for by seeing it as an entirely separate people of non-Canaanite heredity coming out of the desert, professing an utterly supernatural deity, self-contained and complete. In my opinion, all the evidence tells against the notion of Israel as a preset monolithic entity and all the evidence tells in favor of Israel’s eclectic, synthetic emergence at the vortex of Canaanite civilization. The formalistic proper names of its enemies are best understood as surviving, variously
developed and variously applied labels for sociopolitical collectivities in the jumbled world of Canaan in which Israel arose and out of which segments of Israel itself were composed (Gottwald 1979:502).

But what was it that held these people from diverse backgrounds together? What was it that gave them a common identity? Gottwald suggests that it was the common circumstances and experiences of the people who became Israel which united them (Gottwald 1979:214). In this he disagrees with Mendenhall who emphasizes that it was the religion of Yahweh worship which tied the people together (Gottwald 1979:226).

Furthermore, in Gottwald's view:

Yahweh was not in bond with a people joined by actual genealogical links. While the interrelationships of the groups joined together in intertribal Israel are expressed by means of genealogies, this is easily recognizable as the well-known phenomenon of giving pseudo-kinship symbolic phrasing to complicated couplings and linkages of large heterogeneous social groups. The people with whom Yahweh was in bond did not have a common biologically traceable descent, or even a unified prehistory, but were a composite people whose newfound unity was expressed, in spite of their heterogeneous origins, by means of the sociopolitical artifice of 'the family tree' (Gottwald 1979:688).

In his view, the genealogies which are so characteristic of Israelite description of her past and so central to her self-definition are not accurate and real representations of true biological relationships. The descent patterns preserved in the genealogies depict fictive kin relationships. In other words, the traditional or primordially defined bonds of blood relationships which are described as key elements in uniting the Israelites are, in fact, defined according to the particular historical situation. And the circum-
stances which explain the reason for the emphasis on genealogy in the Hebrew Bible are that the Israelites were concerned to legitimize and rationalize the early Israelite organization.

If the cultural and political formulation of pseudo-genealogies or descent metaphors was developed to an extreme by early Israel, we readily see that this prolix ideology was addressed to the pressing need for rationalizing (i.e., explaining, regularizing, and bonding) the complicated interrelations of communities in a tribal community, of tribal communities in a confederate world of tribes, and of the whole vis-à-vis the constant threat of politically centralized societies to crush the emergent egalitarian social movement. The elaborateness of Israel’s descent ideology and the vehemence with which it was advanced are direct correlates of the fragmented separate sub-histories of proto-Israelites, i.e., of socially uprooted people seeking ideological roots for newly designed, comprehensive and cooperative intergroup relations (Gottwald 1979:337).

Since the ground-breaking studies of Mendenhall and Gottwald, a number of other scholars have reexamined and reconsidered the history of Israel’s emergence in the central hill country (Coote and Whitelam 1987; Coote 1990; Whitelam 1994). Although none have dealt specifically with the question of Israelite ethnicity, all have incorporated discussion of the formation of the identity of the Israelite group and many have used the terms ethnic groups and ethnicity often in their works. One of the most significant of these recent writers is Baruch Halpern.23

Like Mendenhall and Gottwald, Halpern does not discuss ethnic theory specifically. However, he uses the term a great deal in his discussion and arguments about

23 See especially his important study The Emergence of Israel in Canaan (1983b).
Israelite identity, although a lack of theoretical clarity is evident. In a critique of Mendenhall and Gottwald beginning with the ‘apistu, Halpern follows de Vaux and argues that the ‘apistu were an ethnic group and not a socio-economic class as suggested by the “revolt theorists” (1983b:53). Nonetheless, he points out that they were not necessarily a unified economic or residential group. Furthermore, he feels that the bonds which held the ‘apistu together were bonds created by socio-economic circumstances. In sum, he writes:

It may be that in the ‘apistu phenomenon, the scholar is confronted with a case of ethnicity determined by life-style, with groups of people lumped together because they are not involved in the more orthodox specie of societal commerce. At the same time, affinal and other solidarities may emerge among this “mixed multitude.” In other words, the “Hebrews” may have been ethnic even if they were a social class; and, the inverse relationship could also obtain (Halpern 1983b:54).

With this comment, Halpern reveals something of his understanding of ethnicity. The phrase, “ethnicity determined by life-style,” in the first sentence of this paragraph is significant in that it suggests a view of ethnicity somewhat similar to Gottwald’s. He argues that it is the social situation of the ‘apistu (alienated outcasts), and not an a priori identity, which determines their ethnicity. In his view they had not yet developed the affinal or geographical aspects of their emerging ethnicity, but they did have common social circumstances which united them. This is a classic anthropological perspective which focuses on the importance of circumstance for defining an ethnic identity. However, Halpern does not discuss further the theoretical framework inherent in this view or work out the full implications of it. In the end he draws a loose analogy with the Arab tribes of World War I and suggests that “the ‘apistu may
be the sort of overarching ethnic group of which the Arabs represent one instance" (Halpern 1983b:55).

With respect to the emergence of Israel in the land, Halpern seems to suggest that there were two aspects to the process. The first stage was characterized by an ethnically distinct group of Israelites entering the land from outside. The process continued in a second stage which involved some of the indigenous Canaanite population who had interests similar to the Israelites assimilating to the initial group.

Regarding the first step in the process, Halpern takes what seems to be a primordial view and maintains that there was an Israelite ethnic identity already in place before they entered the land. Thus he speaks about “some Israelite Hebrew group” entering Canaan through the Aijalon Pass (Halpern 1983b:91). This suggests a primordial understanding of Israelite identity. Furthermore, he states that:

The Israelite recollections and the rise of the Hebrew kingdoms converge in their evidence. Both bespeak military adventure and the dawning of an ethnic consciousness and concomitant political implications. As Israel’s heterogeneity in Canaan indicates, as Israel’s systematizations of her history indicate, as lists such as Judg 1:21 ff. agree, Canaan was characterized by the sort of fluid conflict characteristic of the Amarna age, but conflict marked not just with political and economic, but also with ethnic consciousness. The simplest way to explain this is to invoke traditions of a Hebrew or Israelite invasion following on the heels of occasional penetration (Halpern 1983b:90).

This is an important passage for it reveals Halpern’s somewhat confusing understanding of ethnicity. On the one hand he seems to argue for a slow process of ethnic emergence. This, he says, is indicated by the heterogeneity, fluidity, and conflict at the end of the late Bronze Age. This argument is consistent with a circum-
stantialist understanding of ethnicity. However, on the other hand, he suggests that this diversity can best be explained, at least in part, by the arrival of an outside group with an already formed ethnic identity. By not discussing where or how this external Israelite identity was formed, such an explanation is predicated upon an *a priori* understanding of ethnicity.

Halpern argues that already the people of the hill country “regarded themselves as ethnically distinct from the lowlanders,” and able to be self-sufficient and resistant to the turmoils at the end of the late Bronze Age (Halpern 1983b:100). Indeed, he feels that the Merneptah stele is documentary evidence of a distinct “Israelite ethno-national consciousness” (Halpern 1983b:216).

He argues that the core group of Israelites grew in size by assimilating some of the indigenous Canaanite people who had similar interests because they lived in the same region, had a similar agricultural economy, and a history of revolt against Egypt.

Halpern sees religion as a key factor brought by the embryonic core arriving from Transjordan in creating the larger ethnic group (Halpern 1983b:102). The original group dominated and absorbed the indigenous hill country population and “indoctrinated them with a sense of a new order, instilling in them a distinctive solidarity” (Halpern 1983b:103). He suggests that “Yhwh represented the unifying force of the later confederacy; the religion of the (egalitarian) covenant welded and distinguished the Israelite ethnos” (Halpern 1983b:92). He suggests that the Israelite consciousness cannot be described apart from the covenantal ideology of the Yahweh worshippers. “It was in the cultic sphere that the first articulations of unity must have developed. Israelite ethnicity seems . . . to have been expressed and in part constructed first on common allegiance to Yhwh, the king of Israel” (Halpern
Halpern also recognizes the creative force of religion in forming an ethnic identity. "In a sense, the cultic community of Israel did more than articulate ethnicity; it reinforced that ethnicity, impressed it on the young, gave it a whole network of symbolic systems, of mythologies, and so forth in which to trade and with which to develop all manner of social and economic ties" (Halpern 1983b:236). But, in his view, religion was not the only factor which established the Israelite ethnic identity. He writes: "Yahwism, such as it was, expressed solidarity among Israelite and affiliated elements; it was not tantamount to Israelite status" (Halpern 1983b:240).

It is unfortunate that Halpern does not clearly discuss the features of the Israelite's social situation which defined their ethnicity. The most concise statement is in a summary section on political developments in early Iron Age Israel. Halpern writes: "Israel proceeded from a rural, agrarian basis in a period presumably some years before Deborah's time, in the wake of the descent of Canaan's city-states into general insolvency and relative impotence. Their ethnicity was cultural, geographic, affinal and cultic in character" (Halpern 1983b:235). However, this statement is as explicit as any in his work and, unfortunately, he does not explain in more detail how the specific elements of culture, geography, affinal relationships, and cult defined Israelite ethnicity, either primordially or in response to particular circumstances. The confusion remains throughout his work, unfortunately, for nowhere does Halpern make explicit his theoretical position regarding ethnicity.

However, he also suggests that eventually, "over the course of the 13th and 12th centuries, an ethnic consciousness and solidarity dawned on this Israel" (Halpern 1983b:91) and that this group confederacy was in place by the time of the Song of
Deborah. “The decentralized, rural Israel of the 12th century was characterized by a distinctive ethnic consciousness and even a considerable solidarity. SDeb (sic) attests strongly to the relative integration—economic, as well as religious and ethnic—of Israelite elements throughout Canaan” (Halpern 1983b:213). Halpern is seemingly unaware of the theoretical inconsistency of this statement in light of his argument that Israel entered the land with an already formed identity.

Eventually, by the twelfth century, and possibly earlier, a clear distinction emerged between Israelites and Canaanites. “This dichotomy was expressed not in sociological terms—Israel by Deborah’s time, and therefore most likely from the start of any entity we could call “Israel,” comprehended a full kinship system, a social contract, probably a set of land-tenure theories—an integrated social structure. Israel distinguished herself from the Canaanites on the basis of what one can only call ethnicity” (Halpern 1983b:103).

The revolt theorists have, in general, suggested that the ethnic identity of Israel was not established a priori, but gradually emerged, as did the people, autochthonously — as a part of the many changes sweeping through Syria-Palestine at the end of the late Bronze Age. In their view, Israel’s ethnicity developed slowly in response to changing circumstances. While the scholars who take this position are apparently more cognizant of recent anthropological theorizing on ethnicity, the lack of theoretical clarity remains a problem, for their views on ethnicity remain unstated and epistemologically unclear. That is, these writers do not present an explanation of what they see in their data that indicates a group’s ethnic identity. In other words, they are not clear about how they gain their knowledge of a group’s ethnicity.
Post-Revolt Theorists

The work of Mendenhall and Gottwald has spawned much additional work in the history of early Israel and a great deal of debate on the relative merits of the conquest, immigration, and revolt theories. One of the more prominent perspectives that has developed in the years since Mendenhall’s and Gottwald’s original publications can perhaps be termed historical scepticism. In the view of the proponents of this approach, “the overall description of Israel’s history in Genesis—Kings and in Chronicles fails to be confirmed by the available non-biblical data, though these works do now and then contain incidents that are attested elsewhere” (Davies 1995:702). Any history of early Israelite identity that is based on the biblical text is problematic in their view.

Our purpose in this section is not to survey or evaluate these more recent histories of early Israel from an historical perspective. As before, our intent is to illustrate that, in spite of the scepticism these scholars bring to biblical texts, they are not as sceptical of their own anthropological assumptions and they still exhibit a lack of epistemological clarity with regard to ethnicity, a concept which, however, is a common feature in their work.

Thomas L. Thompson’s Early History of the Israelite People (1992) is a prime example. The terms “ethnic” and “ethnicity” appear frequently throughout the text and, indeed, in the titles of two chapters, Chapter VII, “Israel and Ethnicity in Palestine,” and Chapter VIII, “Israel’s Tradition: The Formation of Ethnicity.”

However, there is no discussion of anthropological theory and not a single work on the anthropology of ethnicity appears in the bibliography of the book. The terms are applied throughout without the epistemological clarity they require.

However, Thompson’s understanding is revealed by his use of the terms in his work and especially in his conclusion. He states:

The concept of a *benei Israel*: a people and an ethnicity, bound in union and by ties of family and common descent, possessing a common past and oriented towards a common futuristic religious goal, is a reflection of no sociopolitical entity of the historical state of Israel of the Assyrian period, nor is it an entirely realistic refraction of the post-state Persian period in which the biblical tradition took its shape as a cohering self understanding of Palestine’s population (1992:422).

Ethnicity, in his view, is a social category that is essentially stable and unified and which signifies a coherent group of people unified by common ties of blood, history, and religious ideology. He goes on to say:

It rather has its origin and finds its meaning within the development of the tradition and within the utopian religious perceptions that the tradition created, rather than within the real world of the past that the tradition restructured in terms of a coherent ethnicity and religion. In this, the religion of “Israel” is not identifiable with the religion of *Palestine* of the past, however much it echoes and reasserts aspects of that past religion (1992:422-423).

Ethnicity, thus, as a static category, has a specific point of origin. But paradoxically this point of origin is not in “the real world of the past” but in the created tradition which was formed much later than the events it purports to describe. Thompson’s view of ethnicity appears to be somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand it represents a
concrete group of related people with a common origin and a common history; on the other hand it represents a category created by later tradition.

This confusion is found elsewhere as well. In a brief summary discussion of the archaeological evidence for the late Bronze Age — early Iron Age transition, Thompson rightly suggests that caution must be exercised “before we associate developments in settlement forms and economies, or innovations in physical remains, with changes in ethnicity. Such factors are not ethnic markers, however much they may provide the material cultural foundation for ethnic formation” (1992:303). This displays considerable lack of clarity with regard to “ethnic markers” and “ethnic formation.” As well, the terms are used in a manner which implies that Thompson views ethnicity as a static category which is subject to “formation” and which is indicated by “markers.”

Thompson clearly assumes that ethnicity involves an identifiable and distinct population. This view is evident in the following passage:

Given the geographical exposure of Palestine to migration from the North, the South, and the sea, and given the international dislocations that occurred throughout Palestine and the whole of the eastern Mediterranean world at the turn of the millennia, the populations of not only the city-states on the coasts of Phoenicia and Philistia, but also those areas where eventually the regional states of Israel and Judah emerged in the hill country during the Iron II period of the ninth and eighth centuries, must have involved more than just the indigenous population of Palestine and its steppe. These regions—including the central hills—must have absorbed many displaced groups immigrating into Palestine from the outside. Ethnic unity is an unlikely factor in historical reconstructions of the early formation of any of these states (1992:306).
Ethnicity, in his view, involves unified groups which, given the turmoil at the end of the late Bronze Age, were distinct ethnic units at this time and so could not have resulted in a unified Israelite ethnicity.

Thompson also appears to assume that ethnicity involves a distinct territory. In his view “... Israel’s origin as a people needs to be associated with the unification and integration of the central highlands with the lowland valleys, the Judean highlands, the Judean coast, the Shephelah, the Galilee, Gilead in Transjordan, and the southern steppelands...” (1992:315). “The origins of Israel’s people lie inextricably with the origins and histories of these apparently distinct regional settlements” (1992:316).

This point is supported further by the suggestion that language is also an important factor in ethnicity. “As geography, economics, and the process of sedentarization are the most fundamental factors causing ethnic differentiation in these regions, language is the single most apparent and distinctive ethnic marker” (1992:336). Indeed, Thompson takes something of a functionalist view in suggesting that “the function of language in creating the unity and homogeneity of the region’s emerging ethnicity cannot easily be dismissed” (1992:338). It appears that he views ethnic groups as a primordialist in that he implies ethnicity is static. The group’s identity is determined by such factors as language, economy, geography, and tradition which results in the creation of a particular ethnicity at a particular point in time, but without any influence from any ethnic identity held by people prior to that point. In Thompson’s history, this point is in the Persian period and Israelite identity did not come into being until that stage.

Niels Peter Lemche is another scholar who in the past decade has addressed the issue of identity in the context of his work on Israelite and Canaanite history (Lemche
1985; 1988; 1991) and, like Thompson, the terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" appear frequently in his work. Lemche is particularly noteworthy because he does include a very brief discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity (1985:239-242; 1991:51-52). However, his survey of relevant theories of ethnicity is incomplete and does not take into account substantial developments in the field following the work of Barth (1969). Furthermore, Lemche ends up on the primordialist side of the debate about ethnicity despite his apparent cognizance of Barth and the circumstantialist position. His suggestions about ethnic identity are thus one-sided and flawed.

The key point that Lemche highlights from the anthropological literature on ethnicity is the difference between "the ethnographer's ideas about traditional society and the ones prevailing in that society itself" (1991:51). The case he gives in point is that of the Nuer who were described in detail by Evans-Pritchard (1940). Later work among the Nuer, however, revealed that they defined their group identity quite differently than was described in Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic account and, indeed, even called themselves by a name different than the "Nuer," which was how they were identified by neighbouring folk (Southall 1976; 1970). The point Lemche illustrates with this case is that the "modern notion of ethnicity" and group identity is not the same as the traditional notion of identity (as in the case of the Nuer) or, by analogy, the idea of group identity present in ancient societies, such as the Canaanites (1991:52). The difference, Lemche argues,

is that we today possess very definite ideas about the identity of peoples and nations which accord well with the division of our world into nation-states. In the ancient world — and this at least is applicable to Western Asia — no such nation-states existed and no nationalistic ideology had yet arisen (1991:52).

In his view, nationality and ethnicity are clearly equated.
Since the Nuer do not fall into the category of a nation because their self-defined identity is very flexible (they could be identified in one way by their neighbours but in a different way themselves), they use a different notion of group identity, not the "modern" notion of ethnicity which Lemche implies is the only legitimate model for the discussion. In other words, the "modern" nation and nation-state with clearly defined, tightly bounded, and well established identities, are, in his view, what is indicated by the concept of ethnicity. Thus, neither the Nuer nor other pre-modern peoples can be described as ethnic groups in the sense he uses. And furthermore, with regard to the peoples of Western Asia, they also "never considered themselves to be citizens of nations or nation-states and they never thought of themselves as belonging to a definite ethnos in contrast to other ethne (1991:52).

Lemche's understanding of ethnic groups, however, reflects a primordialist understanding of ethnicity. It is, in Lemche's view, correct to equate modern nation-states and nationality with ethnicity and ethnic groups. Nations have clearly defined borders and are signified by unequivocal labels, according to Lemche, that make the identity of their citizens unmistakable. Where or how such identities are created is not considered or explained — they just are. This is a primordialist view at its best. And, in his view, since the Nuer and ancient West-Asian groups are pre-modern peoples and not nations, they cannot be ethnic groups.

These trends in Lemche's thinking are present as well in his discussion of Israelite identity. The connection between ethnicity and nationality is apparent in the manner in which he ties together the emergence of a distinct Israelite identity and the emergence of a distinct Israelite nationality. He suggests that the biblical picture of Israelite prehistory was intended to function as legitimation for Israelite control of the land (1988:112-113). And, in order to do this, "the writers chose the concept of an
Israelite nationhood, that is, the idea of a nation which forced its way into the territory of others and seized it” (1988:113). Indeed,

In the case of Israel, it is possible that the writers chose to speak of a ‘settlement’ instead of an origin in the country in order to emphasize the racial purity of the people of Israel at a time when people were convinced that the Israelites were something quite special and different from all others . . . . Thus it is entirely possible that the emergence of the Old Testament account of Israelite prehistory was a function of the separation of an Israelite nation or Israelite people from other peoples. (1988:114)

Lemche’s use of the phrases such as “nation which forced its way into the territory of others” and “racial purity” and “separation of an Israelite nation or Israelite people from other people” are all indications of his primordial assumptions about ethnicity. They show that, in his view, a group’s ethnic identity and its sense of distinctiveness from other groups is based on the group’s nationality and its “racial purity.” This assumes that a group’s unity is a priori. It is not a circumstantialist position which suggests that a group’s unity is negotiated and flexible, changing as circumstances change.

The last of the recent works that we will examine which discuss Israelite identity is E. Theodore Mullen’s Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries (1993). His aim is “to contribute toward formulating and developing a different set of questions that, if answered, allow for a new understanding of some of the roles and functions that can be attributed to the literature under consideration” by creating and applying “a new model for analyzing a particular set of narratives contained within the Hebrew Bible” (1993:3). Specifically, he wishes to address “the present text of the deuteronomistic history as it might have functioned with respect to the formation
of the community whose identity as an ethnic group was threatened by the exile with complete assimilation and ethnic dissolution” (1993:5). This agenda differs from the goals of the other works we have discussed thus far in that it is not concerned particularly with early Israelite history or with the emergence of a distinct Israelite identity. Rather, Mullen’s argument is that the deuteronomistic history functioned “to develop and maintain a new social construction of Judahite reality” and to create “social ethnic boundary limitations” that enabled the exiled community to retain its identity (1993:10). In other words, “the book of Deuteronomy might be interpreted as a type of social manifesto that attempts to give a form and structure to an ideally visioned ethnic group called ‘Israel’” (1993:12). He is thus concerned with defining what role the history played in the community in which it lived, specifically the exilic community.

His argument with regard to ethnicity is that the deuteronomistic history acted to create a sense of ethnic identity for the exilic community. He thus sets the deuteronomist’s history in a specific historical context beginning with the release of Johoiachim from prison in Babylon in 561 B.C.E. (2 Kgs 25:27). This, Mullen suggests, is the specific period in which the exilic community experienced a religious and cultural crisis which the deuteronomist’s history was meant to address (1993:38). The sense of ethnic identity was produced, he argues, by the presentation of “shared memories of a common history” that bound the members of the community together and provided “a set of boundaries” for the group (1993:14). Specifically,

By recreating in narrative form a series of ‘social dramas’ and by using communal expressions of ritual actions, especially in the form of confessional, covenantal expressions, at critical junctures within the narrative, the deuteronomistic author created a ‘common myth of descent,’ a history that
could be shared by the group facing the tragedies of the exile. (1993:10)

The narrative of the deuteronomistic history, therefore, functioned to construct the social reality of Israelite national and ethnic self-consciousness (1993:15).

The problem with Mullen’s work from our perspective is that, in spite of his specific concern with ethnicity and ethnic identity and in spite of some very brief discussion of ethnic theory, his approach employs a narrow and one-sided epistemological framework with regard to ethnicity. Mullen, much like Lemche, views ethnicity as primordial and builds his argument on an understanding of ethnicity that owes little to recent anthropological discussion and developments in the field since Barth (1969). Although he does take note of Barth’s key point on the flexibility of ethnicity, he does not completely incorporate this theme into his view of Israelite identity or of the role taken by the deuteronomistic history in the creation of that identity. Rather, Mullen underlines what he sees as the “self-ascriptive” aspect of ethnic identity which “both insures the continuity of such groups and is dependent upon the erection and maintenance of boundaries” (1993:36-37). This, in our view, is placing particular emphasis on the apparent static, structural, conservative, and coercive aspects of ethnicity, that is, on the primordial. Note that, from this perspective, the members of the ethnic group are held together not by their own desire and will but by boundaries which insure the group’s continuity. Indeed, religious narratives, in Mullen’s view, are key “expressions of the boundaries which define those areas of meaningful and legitimate social interaction and communal activity” (1993:37). And the role played by or function of such religious expressions is “the erection and maintenance of those boundaries” which “become essential to the survival of the group” (1993:37). And, although he does recognize Barth’s important point that ethnic boundaries are flexible and can change, he states that “a significant aspect of ethnicity, especially in regard to
its religious function, is the denial of such changes and the insistence upon an absolute continuity with the past" (1993:37). In other words, the group’s ethnic identity does not change its expressions of ethnicity because of the will of its members to create a new identity but, in fact, the group is restricted and constrained by expressions of identity which define the group’s ethnicity.

A further indication of his primordial understanding of ethnicity is that Mullen cites the views of two primordialist anthropologists in support of his own discussion of ethnicity, Geertz and Smith. He uses Geertz’s (1973b) definition of religion to support his argument that “religion claims, at the most basic level, to be the source from which culture, or ‘true’ culture at any rate, is derived” (1993:36). Indeed, Mullen suggests that “Religion grants stability to those who are persuaded by the symbolic universe created and ‘factualized’ by this common cultural phenomenon” (1993:36). Thus, he suggests, following Geertz, that religion makes a powerful and coercive assertion which provides the basis for a group’s sense of identity and its “true” and “factualized” culture. Religion is, from this primordial perspective, the coercive a \textit{priori} source for a group’s stability. Similarly, Mullen cites A. D. Smith’s (1989) view that “ethnic groups are built upon shared memories of a common history that binds members together and separates them from others” (1993:14). In the work Mullen cites and in other writings, Smith argues that behind the rise of modern expressions of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism there are experiences of common history, past deeds, glorious victories, and tragic losses that define a group’s identity and ensure its persistence (1984a; 1984b; 1988; 1993). In his view, these primordial \textit{a priori} experiences are the forces that make ethnic groups persist and are the experiences upon which expression of their ethnicity are based.
A final aspect of Mullen's work which is related to his primordialist perspective on ethnicity is the emphasis he puts on "function" and, in particular, on the function of the deuteronomistic history narratives in the creation of an Israelite ethnic identity. This concern appears to reflect a mode of anthropological thought — functionalism\(^{25}\) — which seeks to understand and describe how the parts of a social system work together to maintain the cohesiveness, stability, and integrity of the whole social system. This approach emphasizes how the separate components of a social system work together to achieve a successful and stable adaptation in a particular environment. However, the functionalist approach is particularly weak in explaining change in social systems and it presents a restricted view of social systems. It is obvious that societies do not evolve into and then maintain steady states and, furthermore, it is clear all parts of the social system do not necessarily work together to achieve stability. As well, it is not entirely accurate to describe the members of a given social group simply as parts of a large equilibrium-seeking mechanism. Functionalism, therefore, provides a poor theoretical framework for examining ethnicity.

Furthermore, the functionalist emphasis on social stability and cohesion parallels the primordialist view of the coercive power of society in defining the group’s ethnic identity. The boundaries of the group, in the functionalist view, must be in place, \textit{a priori}, in order for the group's identity to exist. Ethnicity and ethnic identity are thus dependent upon the preexistence of the boundaries which define them. Expressions of ethnicity, as argued by Mullen, operate to highlight and emphasize the boundaries which define and, in essence, create the group. But the group’s identity must already

\(^{25}\) The functionalist or structural-functionalist approach is based primarily on the work of E.R. Radcliffe-Brown, \textit{The Andaman Islanders} (1922) and Bronislaw Malinowski, \textit{Argonauts of the Western Pacific} (1922).
exist in order for the narratives to function in the way in which he suggests they do.

The problem with the post-revolt theorist’s use of ethnicity is the continuing tendency to reify and primordialize the ethnic group and its boundaries. This approach, however, does not address the circumstantial aspect of ethnicity. Furthermore, none of these scholars present a sufficient discussion of anthropological theories on ethnicity or describe how they see ethnicity depicted in their data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that ethnicity, for the most recent scholars of ancient Israel, is a more complex topic than it was for those writing some 20 years ago. It is also clear that more recent writers discuss ethnicity with considerably more sophistication. However, it is still evident that there is a continued lack of epistemological clarity and a general tendency to treat ethnicity in primordial terms. The result is that the discussion and understanding of ethnicity and ethnic identity by scholars who treat Israelite identity remains weak in terms of anthropological theory.

Within the broad sweep of the field of Israelite studies, it is apparent, however, that as general societal awareness of ethnicity and ethnic relations developed through the twentieth century, so too did the framework of scholars with an interest in the identity ancient Israel. We note that when anthropologists were focusing on the issues of race and assuming that distinctions between human groups were based on racial differences, so too were historians of the Bible and the Ancient Near East. With this assumption in place, the basic model was conquest. A “package” of people, Israel, who were racially distinct from other peoples in the area, moved into the central hill country of Palestine and took it by force. The anthropological epistemology of group
identity was strictly primordial.

However, as assumptions about racial distinctions between groups of people were discredited and the anthropological community turned its focus more on the tribe, so too did biblical historians. Biblical scholars assumed that one basic unit of human organization was the tribe and turned their attention to the movements and organization of nomadic tribal groups. The dominant view for the emergence of Israel thus became the immigration model with its assumption that tribal groups moved into the fertile central hill country from the barren deserts to the east. However, the epistemology was still primordial as the group’s identity was assumed to be formed and active at the time the people entered the land.

Once the tribe came under closer scrutiny by the anthropological community and tribalism was shown to be more complex and less useful as a categorizing tool (see Fried 1968), attention turned more to ethnic identity and ethnicity as another model for describing and discussing differentiation in human groups. Concomitant with this shift in anthropological focus has been a shift in the views of biblical and Near Eastern historians to models of indigenous development as the best means to describe and discuss processes of change and shifts in the patterning of human groups in the area. Ethnicity has figured in many of these studies, as we have seen. And the so-called revolt model has gained prominence as one of the favoured explanations for emergence of Israelite identity in the highlands of Canaan or Palestine in the early Iron Age. Nonetheless, most scholars since Mendenhall and Gottwald who have addressed or even simply touched upon the subject of Israelite identity have continued to treat the issue as a question of ethnic origins concomitant with the emergence of a distinct group of people in the land and without attending to how the processes of ethnicity are expressed in the textual sources.
This question of when or how Israelite ethnic identity emerged, however, is an historical issue and will not be treated in this work. Rather, our concern is to clarify and specify how it is that we can know or say anything about identity in terms of ethnicity at all. No matter how it was that the Israelites eventually came to live in the land, whether by conquest, by immigration, by evolution, or by some combination of these processes and no matter when the texts describing the group’s history were written, whether close to the time of the events they describe, during the monarchy, or during the exile, our concern is with if and how we can view group identity as expressed in the stories of the major judges in the book of Judges as ethnic identity. Do the stories reveal an ethnic identity and, if so, how is it expressed?

In the previous chapters we have explained our epistemology of ethnicity and have developed a model to apply. As well, we have examined a number of works which are representative of the approaches to and explanations for Israelite ethnicity and ethnic identity used by a range of scholars and we have noted the understanding or lack of understanding about ethnicity which they have employed. Now we will undertake a reading of the narratives of the major judges in order to illustrate an application of the model to a particular body of material. This will enable us to see how these particular narratives depict group identity and to determine if it is in a manner that is consistent with the model described above.
EHUD

JUDGES 3:12 - 3:30
Ehud
Judges 3:12 - 3:30

Introduction

The first of the major judge figures, Ehud, the son of Gera the Benjaminite, is depicted in this story as winning freedom for the Israelites from the oppression of the Moabites who, according to the tale, dominated Israel for eighteen years. Eglon, the corpulent Moabite king, meets Ehud for an official exchange of tribute. But, after the servants and retainers have left them alone, the left-handed Ehud kills Eglon. Ehud then escapes to Israelite territory where he musters Israel and leads them to victory over the Moabites. Although the action of the story revolves primarily around these two main characters there is, as we will see, ample material for analysis and comparison to the anthropological model of ethnicity we have discussed above.

The story closely follows the general thematic pattern established earlier by the Deuteronomistic historian for the major judges.26 The Israelites, bêné yišrā’îl, did “evil,” hâraʾ, according to the Lord’s standards (Judg 3:12), and so he “strengthened,” yēḥazzēq, the king of Moab against them and he defeated Israel, wayyēlek wayyak ʿet-yišrāʾîl (Judg 3:13). The sons of Israel thus “served,” wayyaʿabdû, Eglon for 18 years (Judg 3:14). But then the Israelites “cried out,” wayyizʿaqû, to Yahweh who “raised up,” wayyāqem, a “deliverer,” mōšîaʾ, Ehud, the son of Gera the Benjaminite (Judg 3:15). After craftily killing Eglon while with him in private, Ehud returns to Israel, sounds the trumpet in the region of Ephraim and, after proclaiming that the Lord has given the Moabites into their hand, kî nātan yhwh

26 See Judg 3:7-11 and the discussion above.
'et-ôyêbêkem 'et-mô'ûb bêyêdêkem (Judg 3:28), leads the Israelites to victory. The narrative ends with the statement that Moab was subdued and peace remained for 80 years (Judg 3:30).

Biblical scholars who have addressed this story have tended to use as their primary method approaches that are either historical or literary. The standard commentaries, for example, manifest an interest in the history of the Israelite community which, according to the story, was now experiencing conflict in its interactions with neighbouring peoples (Garstang 1931; Boling 1975; Soggin 1981). Halpern (1988:39-68) has made a particular effort to show the historical nature of the story and, indeed, concludes that, “This is history, historical narrative, intended by reenactment to communicate antiquarian data” (1988:68). On the other hand, Webb, who is indicative of those who take a literary approach, underlines the satirical nature of the story and the pivotal role that deception plays in its telling (1987:129-132). Brettler is noteworthy for his attempt to combine the historical and literary approaches. He concludes that, “History and literature meet by explaining in tandem how Judg 3:12-30 functioned in ancient Israel” (Brettler 1991). None of these scholars, however, touch on ethnicity.

Of particular interest, therefore, is the work of Handy who does use ethnicity in his discussion. He takes a literary approach and states explicitly that this story is “not history” (1992:233). More significant to our study is the fact that he argues the tale of Ehud and Eglon is “a Moabite joke, which is a subset of the form of literary genre known as ‘ethnic humour’” (1992:233). Handy defines “joke” as “something said or done to provoke laughter”, especially “a brief oral narrative with a climactic twist” (1992:234). Furthermore, he states that “when such a narrative is related so that the speaker’s ethnic group is shown to be superior to that of another, this is ethnic
humour” (1992:234). Indeed, he stipulates that “since ethnicity is central to the humor of the piece, it is fair to call this story ‘ethnic humor’” (1992:235). Nowhere, however, does he discuss or define what he means by “ethnic” or “ethnicity.” This, in our view, is problematic. What is it in the joke that makes it particularly “ethnic?” What is it in the story to indicate that the characters of Ehud and Eglon are representatives of two different ethnic groups? What is it that defines their ethnicity? How are we to know what it is that signifies their membership in different ethnic groups?

As Handy is not explicit about his theory of ethnicity his understanding appears to be based on assumption. Furthermore, because Handy is not explicit about how the story, through its narrative and descriptive details, depicts what he understands as ethnicity, he is erroneously assuming what it is in the text that is indicative of ethnicity. In our view, it is imperative that one be clear about how, if at all, ethnicity is constructed in the story if one wishes to go on to draw conclusions about how the ethnic qualities of any particular group or groups relate to wider historical or literary questions or hypotheses.

The Deuteronomistic interests reflected in the story’s pattern of apostasy, appeal, salvation, and success inform the whole narrative. Nonetheless, the description of the Israelites and their representative, Ehud, who interacts with the Moabites and their king, Eglon, contains elements in the setting and action of the story which may illustrate the processes involved with the formation, maintenance, and expression of ethnic group identities, ethnicity, and ethnic relations. We will examine Judg 3:12-30 for these features in light of the theory we have outlined above. This will help to test the applicability of the theory as well as lead to a better understanding of the way in which ethnicity is expressed in this story. We will begin the analysis with those elements that are depicted in the story in primordial terms.
Primordial Features

Religion may be an expression of an aspect of a group’s identity that supplies a reason or justification for the group’s distinctiveness. In this case, the narrative of the whole incident between Ehud and Eglon is preceded by the statement that the Israelites had done evil in the sight of Yahweh (Judg 3:12). The phrase portrays the Israelites as a group who, at some point before this story begins, had met the expectations of their relationship with the deity but who, in this case, had acted differently and in a manner which is described as “evil,” הָרָא. The relationship between the deity and this particular people is thus presupposed by this opening statement.

The idea of a relationship in place before the events portrayed in the rest of the story is repeated in Judg 3:28. Ehud is pictured spurring the Israelites on to battle against Moab with the cry that “the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand,” כִּי נָתַן יְהוֹיָה לְךָ מָוֵי בְּיֵדֶךָ (Judg 3:28). The group as a whole is distinguished, therefore, by their dependence upon Yahweh in battle and, according to the argument presented in this story, by their reliance on the deity for success. The group’s identity is defined in part by the relationship between the members of the group and this god. The primordiality of this relationship and the primordiality of this aspect of the group’s identity is seen in the way the relationship is portrayed as prior to and essential for the action and events portrayed in this part of the story.

Another expression of identity through religion is found in Judg 3:20. In the scene in which the main characters have their meeting, Ehud approaches Eglon as soon as they are alone to deliver a message which the story describes him introducing
as, "a word from god," dēbar 'ēlōhîm (Judg 3:20). The significant point in terms of identity is that the deity is here referred to as 'ēlōhîm rather than yhwh. The more generic term for a god, 'ēlōhîm, is used in the interaction between the two characters who are representatives of two different groups of people. Yahweh, yhwh, is the name reserved for the deity associated exclusively with the Israelite group. The Deuteronomistic historian indicates that Yahweh was not recognized or accepted by the Moabites. In terms of identity, Eglon the Moabite could not acknowledge a message from Yahweh, primordial god of the Israelites, whereas he could recognize a message from a deity in more generic terms. And Israelite identity is defined, in part, by the relationship between this group and the deity Yahweh, a relationship that is established apart from the action of this particular story.

Territory is an additional aspect of group identity that is expressed primordially in this story. In the description of Moabite supremacy over Israel, the Moabites are said to have taken possession of the "city of palms," 'îr hattēmārim (Judg 3:13), which is likely the Jordan Valley city of Jericho (Boling 1975:57; Soggin 1981:49). The description presupposes that Israelite territory, as described in this story, usually included the "city of palms." In other words, the story depicts Moab as the group who controlled the city in this "abnormal" situation of Israelite subjugation. This fact is an indication that the "city of palms" was understood to be normally a part of Israelite "home" territory and not a usual part of Moabite "home" territory. The primordiality of this description is seen in that the "city of palms" is depicted as Israelite without any additional explanation or discussion. Presented as a fact illustrating the situation of Moabite control, it defines the domain of the Israelites which is, in this case, was lost to the Moabites.
However, the description of who possesses the “city of palms” also adds a circumstantial aspect to the depiction of group identity. The statement that the Moabites possessed the “city of palms” is an indication of Moabite control over the Israelites in this particular situation. The conflict and tension between the two groups of people that the rest of the story describes is based, in part, on the condition of Moabite custody of a part of Israelite primordial territory. Thus it is also the specific situation that helps to define the groups’ identity.

The importance of territory as an indication of Israelite identity is also suggested by the boundary marker described specifically as “the sculptured stones,” hapbasilim (Judg 3:19 and 3:26), that in Judg 3:19 are flagged as being “near Gilgal.” There is also a religious aspect to this element. The pāsilim often represent “idols” or “images,” physical representations of humans or animals which may be the object of devotion but that are often stipulated in the Hebrew Bible as items which should not be reverenced in any way.27 In the structure of the story, the two references to these stones frame the one-to-one interaction between Ehud and Eglon: Ehud turns back to deliver his special message to Eglon at the “sculptured stones near Gilgal” (Judg 3:19); and the point in the narrative between Eglon being discovered by his servants (Judg 3:25) and the Israelite rally to battle (Judg 3:27) is marked by the notice that Ehud escaped and went beyond “the sculptured stones” (Judg 3:26). Like the reference to Jericho, these markers indicate the difference between Israelite “home” territory — in both a physical and a religious sense — and Moabite “home” territory — the latter being depicted as that dangerous area which the “saviour,” Ehud, the Israelite representative, must enter to have contact with Eglon, the Moabite king and

27 See, for example, in the “Ten Commandments” Exod 20:4 and Deut 5:8.
leader of the group that dominates the Israelites. The difference between the Israelites and Moabites is thus underlined in the story by the references to these "sculptured stones" which mark the physical and religious boundary between Israelite and Moabite territory. Note that this boundary is not flexible or negotiable but is defined as part of the framework of the narrative. In the manner it is presented in this story, it constitutes a primordial marker of the difference between Israelite and Moabite territories.

Family or group names are other expressions of group identity. Ehud is identified as the "son of Gera, the Benjaminite," *ben-gērā’ ben-hayēmini* (Judg 3:15). Elsewhere Gera is identified as a son of Benjamin (Gen 46:21) or a nephew of Benjamin (1 Chron 8:3). This identifying comment serves to locate Ehud within a specific group and to legitimate his position as representative for the Benjaminites. There is no indication in the story that his membership is flexible or is based on negotiation. By birth he is a member of this particular group. His identity and position is thus depicted as a fixed or structured element in the interactions between the representative of different groups.

The relationship of Benjamin to the group Israel, however, is not defined genealogically but is simply established by the fact that Ehud, the Benjaminite, is described in the story as the deliverer raised up for Israel and not only Benjamin by Yahweh and as the one who carried Israelite tribute to Eglon (Judg 3:15). Indeed, Ehud’s position as an Israelite representative is depicted in this story as being dependent only on the circumstances of the particular situation. There is no primordial connection between Benjamin and Israel expressed in this story. The only indication that Benjamin is related to Israel in any way is suggested by the role described for Ehud the Benjaminite. In other words, that a Benjaminite was described as an Israelite
agent in this story indicates that the Benjaminites were seen as an Israelite sub-group. The relationship, however, was not depicted as being dependent on any prior connection but rather on the demands of the particular situation.

The difference between Israel and the enemies of the Israelites is indicated most simply by the names of the groups. The Israelites are called "sons of Israel," bêne yišrâ'ēl. However, in this case, bêne, "sons of," likely does not reflect actual blood ties but rather is a metaphor used by the text to denote a close relationship at another level (see Gottwald's discussion, 1979:239-241; note also Wilson 1977 and Halpern 1983b:24-26). Although the Israelites are all described as "brothers," this language may reflect only a "pseudo-genealogy," as Gottwald terms it, which is an extension of small-scale or local kin relations into an over-arching explanation for relations of the larger body politic (1979:740 n.168; following Malamat 1973). The exact nature of these larger relations, whether social, economic, or political, is an important historical question but one that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it seems likely that the fact a genealogical relationship is suggested in the phrase bêne yišrâ'ēl means that the text meant to imply that the group was unified by long-standing kin ties.28 As such, it is certainly an expression of ethnicity and it clearly reflects a primordial understanding of group identity.29

Note that in the story of Ehud and Eglon, the history or the circumstance leading to the application of the labels "Israel" and "Moab" to particular populations is not supplied. The names are used as a priori signifiers of the different groups of

28 On the identity of the labeler who used this term, see Besters (1967).

29 For additional work on the the more speculative earliest history of Israel, see Lemaire (1973; 1978; 1984).
people. The action of the tale itself then supports the distinction indicated by the names. In the case of the Moabites, the interaction of the two main characters, Ehud the Benjaminite acting for Israel and Eglon the Moabite, confirms the difference between the groups suggested by the names.

The other named groups, the Ammonites, bēnē ʿammôn, and the Amalekites, ʿāmālēq, are defined as groups opposed to Israel through their association with the Moabites. According to Judg 3:13 they were allied with Moab under king Eglon when he took control of the “city of palms.” Again, the circumstances or situations behind the application of these labels are not described in this story. As employed by the Deuteronomist here, the labels imply a priori distinctions that are then supported by the situation described in the story.

Leadership is the final element that is depicted as a part of the framework of difference between Israel and Moab. Eglon is a king, melek, while Ehud is a temporary saviour, môšîa‘, with a position of leadership only in the particular situation depicted in the story. Indeed, the structure of Moabite leadership is expressed simply by the label, melek, attached to Eglon. There is no discussion or description of how Eglon received or gained the authority to represent the Moabites. Thus, the point of difference, that is, Moabite identity is associated in part with rule by a king while Israelite identity is associated in part with a specially appointed leader, helps to define the difference between the two groups of people. In the case of the Moabites the leadership structures are described as being permanent and independent of the particular situation of conflict. This is not the case, as we will see below, for the Israelites.

In the story of Ehud and Eglon, the interactions between these two characters and the groups of people they represent enable us to examine the depiction of group
identity. We note that in this story features of religion, territory, group names, and leadership are described as features of identity that are static and in place and independent of the interactions depicted in the rest of the story. These represent features of identity that, from the theoretical perspective we have presented above, are defined in this story primordially.

**Circumstantial Features**

Religion, although a significant marker of a group’s identity in structural or primordial terms, may also be an indicator of the distinctiveness of a particular group in the context of a specific situation or circumstance. In this story, Israel’s identity as a group with a relationship to the deity Yahweh is depicted, in part, as primordial. But, in addition, it is through the situation and the particular set of circumstances described in the story that the group’s identity is also defined and expressed in religious terms. The situation described by the Deuteronomist, that Israel was a group of people that did evil in the sight of Yahweh (Judg 3:12), a group that cried out to Yahweh (Judg 3:15), and a group that Yahweh saved by raising up Ehud (Judg 3:15), defines and describes the identity of that group. According to Boling, “evil," hāra, is a “religious offense with sociopolitical consequences” (1975:74). It is a standard Deuteronomistic phrase that appears throughout Judges (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1) and in Deuteronomy (4:25; 9:18; 17:2; 31:29) (Weinfeld 1992). The “sociopolitical consequences,” as Boling sees it and as the text describes, are the oppression the Israelites experience because of their lack of fidelity to Yahweh, the de facto ruler and leader of the people, and their lack of fidelity to Yahweh’s law (Boling 1975:75-76; Weinfeld 1992). Thus, the Israelites are the group of people bound
together by these particular circumstances that are described in this tale. This story depicts a group of people united, in part, by their own actions, the repercussions from those actions, and their interactions with Yahweh. And this identity is expressed here in religious terms through the circumstances of their relations with Yahweh. The group’s identity as a people that has a relationship with Yahweh is expressed primordially. But the circumstances depicted in the story add additional dimensions to that identity.

The political circumstances that the story depicts also define the group’s identity. In this case, the Israelites, the people represented by Ehud, are described as being dominated by the Moabites, the group represented by Eglon. This situation begins, according to the tale, with the Moabite capture of the city of palms, "ir hattémârîm (Judg 3:13). Moabite control over Israel is depicted as continuing so that the Israelites are said to have “served,” ya‘abdû, Eglon King of Moab, for eighteen years (Judg 3:14). The situation of servitude marks the identity of the group. As well, it is in the context of domination that Ehud is described going on the mission of carrying tribute, minhâh, to Eglon (Judg 3:15) and is depicted acting as the representative for the whole group. The circumstances described in the story determine Ehud’s role as group representative. This is likewise the circumstance in which Ehud’s primordial group, Benjamin, is linked to Israel.

A final political situation that defines the group’s identity is described near the end of the story. After Eglon’s death, Ehud calls the people to arms and it is the Israelites, bêné- yišrâ’êl, who follow him into battle against the Moabites (Judg 3:27-29). In parallel to the opening condition of servitude, that defines the group and is marked by the Moabite capture of the “city of palms,” the return of the group to a situation of freedom and independence is marked by the Israelite capture of the fords
of the Jordan (Judg 3:28). According to the circumstances depicted in the story the victory was decisive, the Israelites annihilating a substantial number of Moabites. Thus, the situation of control is reversed at the end of the story, with Israel dominating Moab (Judg 3:30). The military victory of the Israelites over the Moabites that is depicted in this story is a situation that separates and defines the two groups.

A final aspect that is depicted through the circumstances of the action described in the story is the difference between the personal qualities and character traits of Ehud and Eglon. Although much of the action in the story that involves these two characters is dependent upon their unique natures such as, for example, Ehud’s left-handedness or Eglon’s corpulence, these individual characteristics are not used to denote typical features of the groups which they represent. Ehud’s left-handedness is not described as a typical trait of the Israelites and, indeed, he is explicitly defined as a Benjaminite, literally a “son of the right.” Similarly, Eglon’s weight is not depicted as a defining feature for all Moabites. These two characteristics, although central to the action of the story, are not linked to the description of the groups which they represent.

Thus, Handy’s (1992) characterization of the Ehud and Eglon story as an “ethnic joke” is incorrect. The story certainly has humorous features. But as the comic elements of the two main figures, which do help to define and describe their individual identities, are not extended to apply directly to the groups of which they are leaders, then their amusing personal qualities simply define their individual identities, and there is nothing particularly “ethnic” about the humorous qualities of the two characters. The ethnic elements in the story, which express the distinct identities of the Israelites and the Moabites, are not related to the humorous qualities of Ehud and Eglon or to the humour of the story.
In summary we note that the story of Ehud and Eglon depicts a number of features that are relevant to our discussion of ethnicity. In conjunction with those features we have described as primordial, there are also a number of elements of group identity that are described as being dependent upon or unique to the specific situation portrayed in the story. These situational features include religion, political circumstances, including the association of Ehud the Benjaminite with the Israelites, warfare, and territory as discussed above in relation to possession of the "city of palms."

Conclusion

Group identity is expressed in the tale of Ehud and Eglon through characteristics and features that are depicted in both primordial and circumstantial terms. The Israelites are identified in part by their prior relationship to Yahweh and their established association with a particular territory. Ehud, their representative, is identified clearly with a brief statement about his genealogical place within the Benjaminite family. As well, the names which identify the enemies of the Israelites also imply an established difference which is independent of the situation described in the story. But these aspects of identity which are portrayed as being established prior to the incidents described in the action of the tale are not the only features that define the ethnicity of the group.

Ethnic identity is also defined through the particular circumstances that are described in the story. Thus, the Israelites are defined as a group not only by their established relationship with Yahweh, but also by the particular circumstances of apostasy, appeal, deliverance, and liberation that the story describes. Similarly, the political situation that the story depicts, that is, the domination and control of the
Moabites and then, after Eglon's death and the victory over the Moabites, the return to independence, also defines and describes the identity of the Israelite group. Note, however, that, although the Deuteronomist casts the story as a conflict between Moab and Israel, the only Israelite group specified in this situation is Benjamin.

Overall, it is the two aspects together that express Israelite ethnic identity in this narrative. The primordially established features that are depicted in the story are supported, strengthened, and expanded by the situations and incidents described in the action. Both elements discussed in the theory of ethnicity above are expressed in the story of Ehud. This suggests that the model of ethnicity we have proposed can be applied to texts such as the Ehud story in order to analyze such materials for expressions of ethnic identity. It suggests further that Israelite ethnicity, as depicted in this narrative by the Deuteronomist, involves both primordial and circumstantial elements.
DEBORAH
JUDGES 4
Deborah

Judges 4

Introduction

Judges 4 and 5 present one of the rare occasions in the Hebrew Bible where back-to-back parallel passages describe the same event (see the comments of Halpern 1983c:379-380 and Freedman 1987:318). The two chapters relate the story of the defeat of Canaanite forces near the Wadi Kishon in the Jezreel Valley by various Israelite tribal groups under the leadership of the judge Deborah and the military commander Barak, son of Abinoam. The rout is completed when the coup de grâce is administered to Sisera, the fleeing Canaanite commander, by Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, who drives a tent peg through his head. It is a wonderful story, rich in detail and narrative art. The texts also reveal much of their writers' understanding of differences between the people involved and so are significant for our analysis of ethnicity.

There is a general consensus about the antiquity of Judges 5 (except for Ahlström 1977), and it appears, on the basis of its poetic form, style, language, and orthography (Albright 1922; Robertson 1972; Miller 1973; Cross 1973; Cross, Freedman 1975; Freedman 1980), to be an older version of the events and the basis for the re-telling of the tale in Judges 4 (Malamat 1971; Halpern 1983c; Na’amān 1990:433). Judges 4 is generally agreed, therefore, to be a later edition of the same story told in Judges 5 (see Halpern's discussion, 1988:76-97 and Malamat 1971; Halpern 1983c; Na’amān 1990). In its context within the Deuteronomistic History, Judges 4 represents an interpretation of certain events depicted also in Judges 5 and Joshua 11. This story of Deborah casts events in the typical Deuteronomistic pattern of apostasy,
appeal, deliverance, and liberation and prepares the reader for the poetic version in Judges 5.

As with other portions of the Hebrew Bible, in addition to the standard commentaries (Moore 1910; Burney 1920; Gray 1967; Boling 1975; Soggin 1981), some scholars have approached the text of Judges 4 primarily as literature (Murray 1979; Amit 1987; Brenner 1990), while others have focused on historical issues (Mayes 1969; Yadin 1975; Na'aman 1990). Matthews (1991) is one of the few who has treated it anthropologically, although he does not focus on ethnicity.

Our analysis will concentrate on the manner in which group identities and difference between groups are portrayed in the story of Deborah. Our interest will be to identify first those elements of identity which are described as being independent of the action in the story and second those elements of identity that are described as being dependent upon or arising out of the action and events depicted in the story.

Primordial Features

In Judges 4 and in Judges 5 names of groups are used as labels that indicate or imply that there were established identities for the particular groups involved. The Israelite people themselves are identified in Judges 4:1, 3, 5, 23 and 24 as bênê yišrâ'êl, "sons of Israel."30 The conspicuous appeal to kinship in the naming of the group in Judges 4, "sons of Israel," especially reflects a primordial sense of unity.

Other groups are also identified by name. The enemy of Israel, Canaan, kêna'can, is specified in Judges 4. The additional situational detail is added that

30 As well, the group name appears simply as yišrâ'êl in Judg 4:4 and 4:6.
Canaan is led by the specific king, Jabin, yābīn, of the city of Hazor (Judg 4:2), as well as the name of his general, Sisera, sīšērā', and his place of residence, Harosheth-hagoiim. Only two Israelite groups are named specifically, Naphtali and Zebulun (Judg 4:5-6, 10), instead of the ten listed in Judges 5. And the Kenites, haqqēnî, are named as part of the description of the role played by Jael.

The way in which these names are used in this story, as labels that the text uses to signify what are assumed to be a priori distinctions between the various groups of people who play a role in the story, implies that these distinctions were established primordially, that is, prior to the action depicted in the story. Although the antecedent details are not supplied here, insofar as the labels are used to indicate different groups, they suggest that differences between the groups of people were not dependent solely on the particular circumstances described in this story. However, note as well that the actions described for these groups of people also add to the definition of their identity through the roles which are assigned to them in the circumstances of the action.

Judges 4 also contains specific detail about the geographic setting of the story. Thus, for example, the leader of the enemy is singled out in Judges 4 as King Jabin who is described as being specifically from the city of Hazor. As well, Sisera, Jabin’s commander, is presented as being exactly from “Harosheth-hagoiim” (Judg 4:2, 13, 16). Furthermore, Deborah’s location is given as “between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim” (Judg 4:5) and “Qedes in Naphtali” is given as the home of Barak. In addition, Jael and Heber the Kenite are located “near the Oak of Zaanannim near Qedes” (Judg 4:11).

While these details certainly add to the narrative richness of the story they also are indicative of the fact that one of the key features of a group’s identity is location.
The key point for our analysis is that these geographical details indicate a particular understanding of the distinctions between the groups involved. The two Canaanites, Jabin of Hazor and Sisera of Harosheth-hagoiim, are opposed to the Israelites simply because, in part, they are Canaanites and they come from Hazor and Harosheth-hagoiim which are specifically Canaanite places. Likewise the two Israelites, Deborah, who is located in the hills of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel, and Barak, from Kedesh in Naphtali, are opposed to the Canaanites because they come from these places that are specifically Israelite places. They are not described as coming from these specific locations just in this situation. Rather, this is a primordial association of particular groups of people with particular locations, which strengthens the ethnic identity of the characters. Israelites belong in Ephraim and Naphtali and Canaanites in Hazor and Harosheth-hagoiim. The identity of the characters and their people are inexorably linked according to Judges 4 and the association is not specific to just this situation.

Genealogical information supplied for various characters in the story also contributes to the definition of group identity. Deborah is designated specifically as “wife of Lappidoth” (Judg 4:4) and Barak is stipulated as “son of Abinoam” (Judg 4:6, 12). Similarly, the genealogical background of Jael and the Kenites is explained in some detail. In Judges 4:17 31 Jael is specifically “wife of Heber the Kenite.” However, Judges 4 adds additional details on Heber. He is a member of a Kenite clan that has a peaceful relationship with Jabin of Hazor. In 4:11, Heber is specified as a Kenite who “had separated from the other Kenites” and the Kenites are specified as “the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses.”

31 And also in Judges 5:24.
As mentioned above for the “sons of Israel,” these genealogical details need not reflect actual genealogical reality in order for them to indicate primordiality. Rather, it is the concern of the text for establishing and clarifying the relationship of characters in the narrative with an already established genealogical framework that suggests primordiality. These genealogical details serve to legitimate their place within the ancient kinship structures of Israelite identity that permeate the Deuteronomistic History (Peckham 1985:64). These details represent an expression of primordial aspects of Israelite identity.

The position of the Kenites is noteworthy. The close affiliation of the Kenites with the Israelites is legitimated in 4:11 by the explanation that the Kenites were the “descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses.” In essence, the text suggests with this statement that the bond between the two groups was based on the ancient kinship alliance between Moses and his Kenite wife, a fact established much earlier in the biblical history (Exodus 2:15-22). Here, the Deuteronomistic Historian recalls this primordial relationship, apparently as a means to legitimate the role of the Kenites, through Jael, in providing an Israelite victory in the battle against Sisera.

Summarizing our discussion of features of identity discussed thus far in the narrative of Deborah and the Israelite’s battle against Sisera and the Canaanites, we have seen that some differences between the groups express an a priori sense of distinctiveness. The text treats differences between groups and individual representatives of groups as an established fact which exists apart from the details of the specific situation depicted in the story. Through naming, geographic details, and genealogical information, groups are portrayed as distinctive, separate, and unique, regardless of the particular circumstances surrounding this battle.
Religion is one of the key elements in the situation depicted by Judges 4. It is, in one sense, a primordial feature of the narrative which indicates a priori differences between Israel and other people in the area. This is so in that the relationship between Yahweh and the Israel is assumed to be a distinctive feature of Israelite identity. However, some of the specific circumstances indicating differences between the Israelites and the Canaanites are also focused on religious issues.

First, the situation that led to the battle is outlined in Judges 4:1-2. Here, the text gives the cause for the Israelite oppression as being that the Israelites “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Thus, according to Judges 4, the battle with the Canaanites is a result of the Israelite’s doing evil, hāraʾ, in not following Yahweh. The text does not describe any other historical, social, or economic circumstances which may have led to the battle. The situation that emphasizes the difference between Israel and Canaan and which thus partially defines their ethnic identity is described at this point in the story in religious or theological terms.

Deborah is described as a prophetess who, at that time, bāʿēt ḥahîʾ, was judging Israel (Judg 4:4). Her role and her position are not described as a primordial feature of Israelite religious practice, but are depicted as specific to this particular time. In addition, she “used to sit under the palm of Deborah” (Judg 4:5). Again, this is not an ancient or a priori feature of Israelite religion, but is limited to this case. Deborah, the champion of the people and leader together with Barak, is not depicted as a permanent ruler and the bēnē yišrāʾēl were not depicted with an established leadership structure as were the Canaanites. Unlike their foes, Israelite leadership depended upon the situation and the direct intervention of their god.
Indeed, this element of Yahweh’s relationship to Israel is depicted in the deity’s interactions with the people through Deborah. In Judges 4:6, Yahweh commands Deborah to instruct Barak to take up position at Mount Tabor in preparation for the battle against the Canaanites. The message is specific to this situation. Similar is the manner in which the battle begins. Deborah proclaims to Barak: “This is the day on which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand” (Judg 4:14). And although it is understood that Yahweh is the divine warrior who fights for his people, as in “Does not Yahweh go out before you?” (Judg 4:14), the text has Deborah describe the deity in this way specifically in the context of the particular situation. It is not the rehearsal of a primordial description of the characteristics of the deity but rather a picture of the deity acting in a particular way in particular circumstances. So too is the description of the circumstances of the victory. In Judges 4:15, “And Yahweh threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak,” it is Yahweh who gives the victory to Barak.

Religion, in the way it is depicted in Judges 4, is one of the factors which defines the uniqueness of Israel in the situation depicted in the story. According to the text, it is Israel’s apostasy which leads to the circumstance in the first place. Furthermore, Deborah’s role as judge and spokesperson for Yahweh is limited just to this situation, and the deity is the one who ultimately gives Israel the victory. This is in contrast to the Canaanites whose gods and religious affiliations are completely absent from the description. In effect, the text describes the victory of Israel, the people of Yahweh under the leadership of the prophetess Deborah, over the Canaanites, a people whose gods are not even described and who are under the leadership of a king. The story thus describes the identities of two different groups of people.
Judges 4 also describes a difference between the material culture of the Canaanites and the Israelites. Sisera, the general of the Canaanite army, is said to have had “nine hundred chariots of iron” (Judg 4:3, 13). This statement corroborates the situation depicted in the Song of Deborah, where the material culture of the Canaanites reflects a more urban situation than does the material culture of the Israelites who, as in Judges 5, are described as hill country folk who attack the Canaanite chariot army on the valley floor from the slopes of Mt. Tabor (Judg 4:14).

Likewise, the tent-dwelling heroine of the story, Jael, is pictured with the material culture of a primary agricultural producer as in Judges 5, and is subject to the demands of the urbane Sisera.

The interaction between Sisera and Jael is also described in terms that are specific to this particular situation. Although Jael, the heroine of the story and the one who provides the victory for the Israelites, is a member of the Kenite group, which seems to have a close relationship to the Israelites, especially by the fact of her role in the narrative, Judges 4:17 points out specifically that “there was peace,” šâlôm, between the “house of Heber the Kenite,” bêt heber haqqêni, and Jabin of Hazor. This situation explains why, in the story, the fleeing Sisera is able to seek refuge within a tent of the Kenite group. The boundary between the Kenites and the Canaanites was sufficiently permeable to allow for the kind of close interaction between Jael and Sisera that is depicted in the text.

Some have suggested that this follows a typical pattern of Near Eastern hospitality (Matthews 1991). In Matthews’ view, the text portrays rituals of hospitality being abused by Sisera, thus resulting in shame and dishonour, and ultimately justifying the violence against him (1991:20). Therefore, Jael was simply following the rules of proper behaviour in allowing Sisera to enter her tent. Further-
more, the text bases the hospitality that Jael shows to Sisera on the fact of the peace between Jabin and the house of Heber. This may imply that normally there would not be such peaceful interaction between the Canaanites and the Kenites and it was only because of this “peace” that the interaction took place at all. It seems, therefore, that Judges 4 and the Song of Deborah describe a unique situation and one where the boundaries of interaction were not based on pre-defined primordial rules.

The text also implies that there was some sort of relationship between the house of Heber the Kenite and the Israelites. In Judges 4:22, Jael invites Barak, who is in hot pursuit of Sisera, into her tent to discover the slain enemy. In this case, instead of the interaction taking place because the Israelites and the Kenites enjoyed a particular relationship, the whole scenario is prefigured by Judges 4:9, where Deborah relates to Barak that Yahweh will give Sisera over “into the hands of a woman.” Thus, according to the text, the situation of Barak’s interaction with Jael comes about because of divine intervention. The text does not give any indication of the quality of the relationship between the Israelites and the Kenites. We can only surmise that in order for Jael, a Kenite, to have been an Israeliite heroine, the Deuteronomist intended to show that some kind of situation applied, unstated in Judges 4, that allowed her to be related as closely as she was, in this case, to the Israelites.

We note in summary of the circumstantial features of Judges 4 that, according to this text, religious factors were very significant in creating the situation that led to the conflict between the Israelites and Canaanites and in defining the particular response and end result of the situation. In addition, the material culture situation of the Canaanites differed from that of the Israelites and a particular situation of alliance existed between these groups and the Kenites.
Conclusion

We find in the story of Deborah in Judges 4 that, as in the story of Ehud, group identity is expressed by both primordial and circumstantial features. Naming constitutes a feature which implies that there were primordial distinctions between the groups involved in the narrative. Such labels for the groups involved are used as givens that require no further explanation. As well, genealogical and geographical details highlight *a priori* distinctions between the different named groups. These features of identity imply that the people and places named had great historical depth and are distinct, at least in part, on the basis of long-term structural characteristics. Hence, according to the framework of the model outlined above, they are primordial.

A difference that is depicted as being unique to the particular situation described in the story in Judges 4 is material culture, although the point is made in Judges 4 only by reference to the chariots of Sisera. Details of this situation are more explicit in the *Song of Deborah*. The circumstance of the Kenite-Canaanite alliance is clear in Judges 4, which explains that there was "peace" between Heber and Jabin. Note also that in the situation depicted in Judges 4, it is only the Israelite groups Zebulun and Naphtali which are specified acting together against the Canaanite army under the leadership of Deborah and Barak. Thus, although the conflict is depicted by the Deuteronomist as concerning Israel, in the situation described in this story, it only involved these two groups.

A key circumstantial aspect is in the religious situation described in the text. In Judges 4 a theological interpretation is supplied by the text with the suggestion that the cause of this particular situation of conflict was that the Israelites had not remained true to their relationship with Yahweh. As well, the voice of the deity,
through the mediation of the judge Deborah, is depicted in this specific situation. It is implied, therefore, in Judges 4 that the Israelites are different from the Canaanites, at least in part, because of the unique affiliation they have with their particular god, Yahweh.
DEBORAH
JUDGES 5
Deborah
Judges 5

Introduction

Judges 5, the Song of Deborah, has been studied intensively and enjoys a vast bibliography primarily because it is generally accepted as one of the oldest passages in the Hebrew Bible. The range of research approaches to Judges 5 is impressive. Some recent work has focused on feminist issues since women characters figure so prominently in the story (Lindars 1983; Bal 1988a; 1988b; Couturier 1989; Gevaryahu 1989-90; Fewell and Gunn 1990). However, most of the research has concentrated on linguistic and philological questions (for example Robertson 1972; Cross 1973; Cross and Freedman 1975; Freedman 1980). Other scholars (especially Blenkinsopp 1961; Globe 1974; Coogan 1978; Brenner 1990) have focused more on the literary structure and unity of the poem and have expressed some skepticism about its historicity. However, many have stressed its historical value (Malamat 1971; Aharoni 1971; 1975; Halpern 1983a; 1983b; 1988; Na'aman 1990 for positive evaluations; but see Ahlström 1977; 1986; Caquot 1986 for negative views) while still others (Chaney 1976; Stager 1985; 1988; 1989; Gottwald 1979; Matthews and Benjamin 1992; Schloen 1993) have taken a more anthropological approach. We shall examine the contribution of the later work in greater detail below. First, we will seek those elements which indicate a primordial understanding of Israelite identity and of the differences between the Israelites and other groups.
Primordial Features

The reference to yiśrā'ēl, "Israel," in Judges 5:2 is to a collective term, a label for a group of people.32 The etymology of the name itself is not clear and, indeed, there is nothing helpful for our discussion from the etymological perspective.33 Freedman highlights the fact that the reference to this particular group in Judges 5:2 does not include all of the traditional twelve tribes of Israel (a point to which we will return below) and suggests that it likely refers only to the group of ten tribes that was situated geographically in the north of what later became the unified state of Israel and eventually the independent northern kingdom Israel (1980:153). These included the groups named for their eponymous ancestors Naphtali, Zebulun, Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir and Issachar who joined the battle against the kings of Canaan and the groups Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher who held back from the fighting. Judah and

32 The textual problems of verse 2 are not central to our analysis. The problem is largely to do with the meaning of pr, whether it indicates the “letting go” or “unbinding” of hair or has to do with leaders, the leadership of the people, or the making of preparations for warfare (Boiling 1975:107). See also the discussion by Miller (1973:87-90) and Janzen (1989).

33 See Coote (1972) and Margalith (1990) for the most recent complete discussion. Note also the comments of Gottwald (1979:494); Smith (1990:7); and Halpern (1983:81-82). Ahlström has summarized views of what the word, yiśrā'ēl, refers to and he points out that it is wrapped up thickly with what have been inseparable questions about the origins of the people who used the name and the origins of their religion (1986:5-6). Skjeggestad (1992:161) also has reviewed the different positions. He indicates that scholars have understood the term in at least four different ways and have taken at least four different positions about the underlying foundations for the collective label. It has been seen as a territorial designation (Ahlström 1986), a religious grouping (Mendenhall 1962; 1973; Freedman 1980), a social and political title rooted in the independence of dissatisfied mobile or refugee Canaanite groups, the ‘apîru (Na’amān 1986), or an ethnic label first and foremost from its earliest mention in the Merneptah stela (Lemche 1992). All of these categories, however, emphasize different aspects of elements which all contribute to the definition and expression of ethnicity.
Simeon are not named. Furthermore, the naming of these “tribes” of Israel, reflects the writer's notion of the a priori collective identity of these groups. However, although the antecedent actions that describe the application of this label to this group are not supplied in this story, yišrā'ēl in Judges 5:2 refers to a distinct group of people and its usage implies that there was a group whose members had enough in common that they could be labeled by this term. The name thus implies the primordiality of the named identity.

A number of other groups of people are mentioned by name who were not Israelites, including Canaan, Midian,34 Amaleq,35 Meroz, and the Kenites. The naming suggests a certain primordial aspect. The text gives no further explanation to these identifications and hence reveals through the names an a priori organization and structuring of the distinctiveness of the groups who populate this narrative.

34 Midian is found in verse 10 by emending the Massoretic Text mīddin (mdyn) to mīdyān (mdyn). The word has long been a crux interpreturn. Some have suggested taking it as the only attestation of the plural form of mad, “measure, garment,” and thus retained the Massoretic vocalization, mīddin, “cloth garments” or “carpets” (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951; Kautzsch 1910; Soggin 1981). Boling suggests taking the root as dyn, “to judge” or “judgment” with a prefomative mēm and thus translating it as “judgment seat,” although he does not propose how it is to be vocalized (Boling 1975:110). Coogan suggests revocalization to mīdyān, “Midian” (Coogan 1978:110; Schloen 1993:26). This is the reading adopted in the present study as it is plausible given the general conditions of trade and commerce depicted in the text and the common description of Midianites as traders (e.g., Judg 6-8; see also Schloen's discussion 1993:26-27). The phase yōšēbē ‘al mīdyān is understood as “the rulers of Midian” or “those who sit over Midian” (Schloen 1993:26; Gottwald 1979:512-530). The unusual syntax of a noun in construct form, yōšēbē, before a preposition, ‘al, remains however one vocalizes mdyn. This same construction occurs in the third phase of verse 10, wēḥōlēkē ‘al derek.

35 This is the case if the word b'mlg, “in Amalek,” in verse 14 is not emended to b'mq, “in the valley,” as has often been done (see the discussion of Soggin 1981:88-89). The emendation to ba'emeq, “in the valley,” is based on the reading of the Codex Alexandrinus of the Septuagint. However, as the ba''amālēg of the Massoretic Text requires no emendation and is supported by both the Codex Vaticanus of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, it is the reading we will follow here (see also Schloen 1993).
The reference to the “kings of Canaan,” malēkē kēnaʿan, in Judg 5:19 expresses the political difference between the Israelites and Canaanites. It suggests that the Canaanites were organized politically as a number of monarchies, in contrast to the Israelites who are depicted as not having a fixed leadership pattern. This difference, since it is indicated without any description of particular political circumstances associated with it, is thus a difference that is defined primordially. However, Judg 5 depicts a situation of conflict between the “kings of Canaan” and Israel. The exact nature of the situation which gives rise to this conflict is not explained in detail, and yet there is the implication that particular interests influenced the conflict in that it is described as not involving both populations completely but only sub-groups with their own particular interests. We will examine these interests in greater detail below. Nonetheless, the basic distinction between Canaan and Israel is assumed to have been in place and simply manifested in this incident. Israel and Canaan are distinct in primordial terms and the situation of this conflict reflects and reinforces that distinction.

Midian, another of the named groups, appears in verse 10 in the emended reading yōšēbē ʿal midyān. The reference here, as with the Canaanites, represents an element of differentiation and identification which is implied by the name. And, in addition, the circumstances of Midianite interest are also suggested by the text. The association of Midian in Judg 5:10 to “riders on tawny donkeys,” rōkēbē ʿātōnōt šēhōrōt, and “those who walk on the way,” hōlēkē ʿal derek may represent an allusion by the writer that implies that this group was involved in trade.36

36 This is supported further on the basis of additional evidence in Judg 6-8. It also has some historical support from the archaeological evidence in the northern Hejaz region east of the Gulf of Aqaba/Elat (Mendenhall 1992b:817; Parr 1982). Although Mendenhall (1992b) suggests the presence of locally made Mycenaean style pottery in the early Iron Age here indicates that at least some elements of Midianite society had roots in Anatolia or the Aegean, it seems more likely that such forms indicate
The group Amalek in verse 14a is another primordial reference. It refers to a group of people often described as nomads or seminomads living in the area of Edom, in what today is southwestern Jordan, and who were traditionally depicted as enemies of the Israelites (Mattingly 1992). According to Judg 5:14 and 12:15, they were also situated on the western side of the Jordan in the central hills in territory described as belonging to Ephraim. They figure in the Gideon narrative, as we shall see below. Cazelles (1974) suggests that the reference to Ephraim in Amalek is an indication that the people of Amalek were present for at least some time in the central hills prior to the battle described in Judg 5. Schloen (1993:27) takes the point further by relying on the sense of the form šrš, “root,” in ʾeprayim šorēšām baʿāmālēq, “Ephraim, his root is in Amaleq,” to argue that Ephraim may, in fact, have descended from or even been related closely to Amalek. This may have been true in a different set of circumstances but, as we have no record of those circumstances and the situational details in this verse are nonexistent, the group name used here as a label without any additional explanation suggests that the expression of difference is used in a primordial way.

knowledge and imitation of ceramic forms well-known from trade contacts in the late Bronze Age. However, in Mendenhall’s view, it leads him to conclude that the Midianites likely were not a distinct and autonomous ethnic group, but rather were a “small grass-roots social organization” that eventually grew in size and complexity until it gained some localized political power (Mendenhall 1992b:817).

37 If this were the case, then, in terms of the history of ethnicity, this reference suggests that Amalek, while portrayed as a mortal enemy of Israel in other texts (for example, Num 14:43-45; 1 Sam 15), may at one time have even been allied closely with Ephraim.

38 The situational relations between Israel and Amalek are not specified here in Judg 5. They are, however, central to the story of Gideon in Judg 6-8 and we will discuss them further below. Note, however, that in the association of Amalek with Midian in Judg 6-8, trade is pictured as the central issue around which conflict crystallized.
The fourth name requiring further explanation is Meroz, mĕrôz, in Judg 5:23. As this is the only occurrence of this name in the Hebrew Bible the data are scant. Generally understood to be a place name, but with clear connotations of a people as well, its location has not been clearly established (Gottwald 1979:778, n.507; Hunt 1992:705). Its use here with no additional explanation implies differentiation at a primordial level, although without clear indications of antecedent actions explaining the distinctiveness, this cannot be demonstrated with certainty.

The identity of Meroz also has a situational aspect. Gottwald has pointed out that the yôšêbêhâ, referring to Meroz and traditionally translated simply as “its inhabitants,” should better be understood as “its rulers,” as was suggested above for yôšêbê ‘al midyân (1979:529). He follows Alt (1940/41) on this point and also in suggesting that Meroz was a Canaanite city that had allied itself with the Israelites under Manasseh and was, in some sense, obligated to participate with the Israelites in their wars of freedom against their Canaanite overlords (Gottwald 1979:573). This relationship would explain why Meroz is cursed soundly in Judg 5:23 for not taking part in the battle. As a determination of the historical veracity of this position is beyond the scope of the current study, we note only that the text implies that the two groups had enough of a relationship for the writer to apply a curse against Meroz since it did not meet an expectation of participation. They received a curse in the Song of Deborah because they did not join the Israelite confederation. And this situation was one of the factors which underlined the difference between Meroz and other groups depicted in this story.

The last group, the Kenites, are named in a blessing in verse 24. Indeed, the heroine of the story is Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, yâ‘el ’êšet ḫeber haqqêni (Judg
5:24). Jael is described as a tent-dweller and likely a member of a group of herders since she is able to offer the fleeing Sisera dairy products in a fine vessel. Although distinguished by name, the identity of the Kenites as represented by Jael is established in Judges 5 through the circumstances depicted in the Song of Deborah. It would seem, therefore, that the text depicts a relationship between the Israelites and a group usually not included in the primordial definition of bēnê yišrā‘ēl. In the particular circumstances described in the Song of Deborah, Jael of the Kenites was remembered as a heroine and blessed for her actions on Israel’s side in the battle against the Canaanites. Thus the boundary between the Israelites and the Kenites was not so strongly drawn by the writer of the Song of Deborah that an unequivocal separation was assumed. Indeed, the circumstances depict the opposite, alliance rather than separation. In the situation as it is described in Judg 5:24, the Kenites, as represented by Jael, are not depicted clearly as a separate and distinct ethnic group.

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39 It has been suggested that the Kenites, qēnî, were smiths or metal-workers because of the root meaning of the word, qyn, or musicians because of the meaning of a similar root, qynh (Halpern 1992). However, Halpern suggests that “even if it began as an occupational term, by the time of our texts it had an ethnic denotation—and may bear no relation to the economic activity of Kenites in Canaan” (1992:18).

40 In the Deuteronomistic introduction to Judges, Judg 1:16-17, the Kenites are associated with the Amalekites and described as moving up together with Judah, one of the traditional groups of Israel not mentioned in Judg 5, from the “City of Palms,” usually understood to be Jericho (Kobayashi 1992), into the wilderness of Judah in the “wilderness of Arad,” bēnegeb ‘ārād. Furthermore, although the Massoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible leaves out the name of Hobab, Moses’ father-in-law, it is inserted in Judg 1:16 on the basis of the Septuagint (see the standard commentators and modern translations; Moore 1910; Burney 1920; Boling 1975; Soggin 1981; NRSV 1989; and Judg 4:11 where it appears as well). Note: Exod 2:16-21 states that Moses met his father-in-law, here named Reuel, the priest of Midian, in Midian. Exod 3:1 again refers to Moses’ father-in-law as the priest of Midian, although here he is called Jethro. Thus the Deuteronomistic historian depicts a relationship between the Kenites and the Midianites through Hobab and thus with the Israelites through Moses (Mazar 1992; Halpern 1992). And as this relationship is described in terms of ancestry and kinship, it is primordial.
As we have seen in our analysis of the stories of Ehud in Judg 3 and Deborah in Judg 4, religion may express a group’s identity in primordial terms. Judg 5:4-5 review the qualities and actions of the majestic Yahweh, powerful god of the southern mountains of Sinai (see Miller 1973:90-91; Cross 1973:100-101; Freedman 1980: 147-149). Although it has been argued that this passage describes Yahweh marching forth in this particular situation to do heavenly battle in parallel to the earthly battle of Deborah and Barak versus Sisera (Moore 1910:139-140 and Burney 1920:109-112), it seems more likely on the basis of parallel passages relating the same events (Deut 33:2-3, Hab 3:3-6, Ps 68:17-18) that this is a rehearsal of a primordial myth of Yahweh the warrior god (Gray 1967:277; Boling 1975:108; Freedman 1980:147-148). It harks back to the myth of Yahweh, the powerful God whom the people first experienced during their primordial wandering through the desert after their escape from bondage in Egypt, marching forth from his mountain abode in Sinai at the head of his heavenly armies to battle on the people’s behalf at their conquest and entry into the land of Canaan (see Miller 1973 for a full discussion). It should be noted, however, that this is not the typical full formulaic Deuteronomistic review of the Exodus, Conquest, and Victory that appears elsewhere (see Judg 2:1 and 6:8-10, for example). It is thus not a complete retelling of the idealized and schematized primordial early history of Israel or a complete restatement of the primordial charter, but rather it is a reference to just one facet of the roots of Israelite identity.

Freedman (1980:148) raises the valuable point that, in the context of the history of Israelite religion, these verses commemorate the movement of Yahweh and his

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41 Both Boling (1975:108) and Freedman (1980:147) call this a “flashback.”
people from Sinai north into a new locality, the land of Canaan. Although this no
doubt constitutes an idealized and simplified version of early Israelite history, Judg
5:4-5 describes primordial events that transpired at Sinai. In other words, a primor-
ddial memory of the God of Sinai was retained even though Yahweh became the God
of Zion (Freedman 1980:148).

It is significant that this is a religious aspect. A key identifying feature of
Israelite identity is the relationship of the people with their god Yahweh. This rela-
tionship is assumed by the text and the primordial root of this association in the Sinai
experience is repeated in these two verses as a refrain. It highlights and emphasizes
that Yahweh is the particular god of this particular people and has been ever since the
primordial events at Sinai. Religion, expressed here in terms of the majesty of Yah-
weh, is one of the key primordial factors in Israelite identity and unity.

Also relevant to our discussion of primordial references is the term 'am, a col-
lective word for "people" as a whole, which appears six times in the Song of
Deborah, 5:2, 9, 11, 13, 14, and 18.42 Gottwald suggests that in general usage the
expression is a social, cultural, and ethnic designation and not a political one (Gott-
twald 1979:241, 509-511). If so, its appearance in Judges 5 would indicate that the
writer may have conceived of the group to which 'am referred as a primordially
defined social or ethnic group rather than as a more volatile and circumstantially
defined political entity. The term requires further explanation.

42 For general discussions on this term see Gunneweg (1983), Halpern (1981:190-202), Nicholson
(1965), and Speiser (1960). The common and important expression 'am ha'deres which has a more
specific meaning and which has generated some debate (see Nicholson 1965; Gunneweg 1983; de Vaux
1961; Talmon 1986) does not appear in Judges 5 and so will not be discussed here.
We will begin with two references in the *Song of Deborah* that fall in the description of the tribal groups who participated in the battle. Judges 5:14 refers to the actions of the tribe Benjamin, along with a group referred to as "your people" or "kin," ba'āmāmēkā, and in Judges 5:18, the tribe Zebulun is referred to as a "people," 'am. That this apparently general term is used for these smaller sub-groups of Israel requires some explanation.

Speiser, who has produced perhaps the most relevant study for our purposes, has shown that 'am "was essentially a term denoting close family connections, and hence secondarily the extended family, that is, people in the sense of a larger, but fundamentally consanguineous, body" (1960:159). Indeed, he suggests that the original meaning of the word is still carried in Arabic where the root of the same form, 'amm, has the connotation of "paternal uncle" (1960:160). Thus, by extension, it carries the idea of the whole nuclear family and by further extension, the extended family in its broadest sense, which, according to Speiser, is an "ethnic" sense (1960:160). Weinfeld agrees and notes that the "... 'am denotes a body of persons related by blood" (1992:228, n.1). Finally, in contrast to the word "nation," gōy, which may be the object of the verbal actions "to make," "to establish," or "to found," 'am, the "people," according to Speiser, "just is; it is a physical fact" (1960:160). It seems likely that each of the 'ammīm of Judges 5:14 and 18 are kin groups in the sense of an extended family since they are sub-groups of the larger whole called Israel. Furthermore, they are groups constituted *a priori* who "just are," physical facts which the text describes as part of the reality depicted in Judges 5. Therefore, the term 'am implies historical depth at the sub-group level and gives a
primordial nuance in addition to the primordial fact of labelling by name to the groups named in the *Song of Deborah*.

However, the other appearances of 'am (Judges 5:2, 9, 11, 13) are different in that the word is applied to all of the groups together, that is, to Israel as a whole. The people are specifically "the people of Yahweh," 'am-yhwh, in Judg. 5:11,13. Speiser has demonstrated that many times 'am has clear religious connotations in that it is associated with the deity, Yahweh, and often in possessive constructions, such as, "people of Yahweh" or, in the words of the deity, "my people" (1960:158-159). Gottwald (1979) also feels that its usage in the *Song of Deborah* has clear religious connotations. Furthermore, he points out that the phrase, "Israel, the people of Yahweh," balances in a parallel structure the references to the god as, "Yahweh, the God of Israel," yhwh 'êlôhê yišrê'êl, in Judg. 5:3,5 (1979:242). He suggests that the religious relationship between the people and their god is usually expressed in terms of covenant and that it is the covenantal agreement between Yahweh and the people which is implied here.

The vast amount of research on covenant is not directly relevant to this study (see McCarthy 1972; 1978 for an overview). However, we may note that Mendenhall (1954) has suggested it was probable that the early Israelite community was bound together more by covenant than by real kin relationships or by common political interests. In addition, later in Israel's history the covenant relationship between God and the people was expressed particularly in the language of marriage (especially in Hosea and other passages such as Jeremiah 31:32) or in the language of father-son adoption, both social situations bound by covenantal agreements between the parties involved (for example Deuteronomy 32:19-20; see McCarthy 1965). The idea of
covenant being a central ideology in defining the community is well established. It is likely, therefore, that the word, 'am, may indicate a community united by a covenant which was primordial according to the writer of this text. As such, 'am, if it was used to indicate a group also bound together by particular circumstances, might also represent an ethnic group but without a patronymic label.

Another nuance to 'am is highlighted by Halpern who suggests that the 'am is a "fictive kin-group" (1983b:148). In his view, the various sub-groups who were united around the covenantal relationship to Yahweh found the language of kinship to be a powerful metaphor to express their unity and their "ethnic" relations. But it was a metaphorical "brotherhood" only and not one based on real blood relationships.43 Indeed, he suggests that Judges 5 groups Israel into four sections, 'ummôt or "mother's houses," which correspond to four sets of sons of the eponym Jacob/Israel, each set made up of the sons of Jacob/Israel's four different wives or concubines. And, furthermore, every "'ummâ corresponded to one of the geopolitical and social sections of the 'amm" (Halpern 1983b:149), which, in this case, refers to the whole of Israel as it is constituted at this point in its history. We will discuss below in greater detail the tribal groups, which are named, and which are not. Suffice it to say at this point that, in Halpern's view, the word 'am may use the primordial implications of family relations to express what is a unity created more in the particular circumstances described by the Song of Deborah.

The references to 'am in Judges 5, verses 2 and 9 carry a slightly different social nuance, one which is also present in the term's usage in verses 11 and 13, and  

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43 See Wilson (1977) for an overview of biblical genealogies.
one which implies a more circumstantial aspect to its meaning. We will discuss this in greater detail below.

It seems, therefore, that 'am or “people” in Judges 5 has both a primordial and a circumstantial side. The term, therefore, indicates ethnicity. Halpern (1981:190) makes a valuable point which seems to recognize this. In his view, the “people” were a group defined in a variety of ways, “dependent on the moment and the participants,” in other words, on the circumstances. This would seem to be true especially on the military front. However, 'am also implies some primordial depth especially in the way it draws on the idea of family and kin relations. This sense of 'am, the primordial name yiśrā’ēl, and the covenantal relationship of the people to the god Yahweh all assume a collective awareness and a collective identity without further elaboration. In this sense they are primordial. “Israel,” whether a regional unit or a kin unit or a combination of both aspects, is used by the writer as a collective identifier. It and the kinship sense of 'am refer to the people as a complete and unified whole. Neither of these terms imply or refer to a formative period when there was no collective identity. As used by the writer here in Judges 5, they signify an a priori identity, accepted by the writer and presented to the audience. These terms together with their expression of the deity’s majesty all indicate a primordial understanding of the group’s ethnic identity.

Circumstantial Features

Circumstantial expressions of ethnic identity are also prominent in Judges 5. In contrast to the primordial elements of identity which are assumed and taken as a
priori in descriptions of people in the text, the circumstantial elements are differences that are defined in the particular situation.

A key issue is the description of the tribes, some of whom take part in the battle and some of whom do not (see verses 14 to 18). Halpern (1983c; see also 1988:76-82) has produced the most in-depth study of this problem. Judges 5 agrees unequivocally with Judges 4 that the groups Naphtali and Zebulun are participants. But, according to Halpern, the Song of Deborah also adds Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, and Issachar to the roster of those who join the battle, and lists Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher as groups who do not participate, to give a total of ten, leaving out the groups of Judah and Simeon. The text is difficult and requires careful analysis.

The first phrase of verse 14 is corrupt but it seems clear that Ephraim, together with Benjamin in the second phrase, is included in the verbal action of yrđ which is described for the people as a whole (ʼam yhwh) in verse 13 and specifically for Machir and Zebulun in the second half of verse 14 (Halpern 1983c:383-384; Stager 1988:226). Therefore Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, and Machir were all participants, depicted in the text as among those people who “went down” to battle together with Deborah. It is also clear in verse 15a and 15b that Issachar, described

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44 Yrd appears twice in verse 13 and once in verse 14. The simple meaning is “to come/go down” (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951), but, as Stager suggests (1988:226), in the current context it has an adversative force and so it has the sense of “marching down (to battle) against” (note also Moore 1910:150 and the translation of the NRSV, “marched down”). This fits coherently with the general circumstances of military conflict described by the poem.

45 We read with the Massoretic Text, šōrām, “their root,” as this requires no emendation. Boling, on the other hand, would read šrš as a verbal form (probably a Pōĕl infinitive construct with the third person plural pronominal suffix, although he does not indicate how he would see it pointed), with the sense of “to take root” and translate the phrase as, “those of Ephraim have taken root in Amaleq” (1975:102, 111), thus suggesting that Ephraim did not participate in the battle. However, many others who have struggled with this difficult text have produced interpretations which need not necessarily exclude Ephraim from participation (for an overview see the comments of Soggin 1981:88-89). Note, for example, the rendering of the LXXB presupposes a pointing as an active Piel form to create the sense of “to uproot them” but this would leave them still as participants (see Halpern 1983c:385,
as being “with Deborah,” ʿim dēbōrāh, and the “support of Baraq,” kēn bārāq, is depicted as another of the groups that fought in the battle against the kings of Canaan (Boling 1975:112 for kēn).

At verse 15c, however, there is a qualitative change in the way the groups are described. As Moore puts it: “The encomium of the tribes which under their gallant chieftains marched down to the fray (v.13-15a) is followed by reproaches of those who were missing from the ranks of Israel” (1910:153). Most modern interpreters have followed this line (see Burney 1920; Gray 1967; Boling 1975; RSV 1965; NRSV 1989). Reuben did not participate as is implied by the question about the group’s inactivity.

The history of particular circumstances as depicted in Judges 4 and 5 have been discussed in a number of articles by Stager (1985, 1988, 1989) and Schloen (1993). Together, however, their interpretations of the textual data present positions which

46 Gray emends the phrase to kēn lēbārāq, and takes kēn as an adjective meaning “true” (1967:286) to produce the same sense.

47 However, Halpern argues that these descriptions are not rebukes, but rather are “lyric characterizations, implying participation at war, not narrative assertions of cowardice” (1983c:383). In this he follows Miller (1973) who, following a suggestion of Cross, interprets the lāmmāh, usually translated as, “why,” in verses 16 and 17 as an emphatic lamed in the particle lo-mi meaning “indeed” or “surely” (Miller 1973:96; Cross 1973:235, n.74). Thus Halpern translates verse 16a as “Do you not dwell among the hearths,” as a statement of fact which does not necessarily imply inaction on the part of Reuben. The more common is, “Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,” keeping the lāmmāh as a question and translating miṣpētaṣim as “sheepfolds,” although this same form could equally mean “hearts” or “ash-heaps” (see Burney 1920:141; Moore 1910:154; Gray 1967:287 for “sheepfolds”; Boling 1975:112 for “hearts;” but note the further discussion below). While Halpern’s is technically a possible reading, we prefer to take the Massoretic Text as it stands without emendation and to read lāmmāh as “why.”
dovetail nicely to present a coherent picture of the situation as it is portrayed in the text. Their interpretation of features in the text is what is of interest to our study. Stager’s primary argument (1988; 1989) is that there were socio-economic circumstances that explain why some of the tribes did not participate in the battle against the Canaanites. In his view, the whole of Reuben or, at least, a sub-group within Reuben, held the socio-economic position of “specialized sheep/goat pastoralists” in the early Iron Age society described in Judges 5 (1988:227). In his view, this is indicated by verse 16a, lāmmâh yāšaṭā bēn hammišpētayim lišmōaʾ šēriqʾôt ʿādārîm, which he translates as “Why did you sit beside the hearths, listening to the pipings for the flocks?” (1988:227). He thus takes lāmmâh at face value as “why” and hammišpētayim as “hearth” or “sheep-folds” (see 1989:63; see also Craigie 1977:41-43 for “sheep-folds”; Albright 1968:237, n.ee for “hearth”). He sees the same situation applying to Gilead who, according to verse 17a, bēʾēber hayyaṛdēn šāken, that is, “remained camped beyond the Jordan” (1989:227). Stager also cites in support of his interpretation Num 32:1 where Reuben and Gad are described as settling in the area of Gilead, a region that is depicted as being prime grazing land (1988:227).

Schloen, on the other hand, cites the only other occurrence of hammišpētayim, Gen 49:14, where Issachar is described as being as “strong as a donkey,” and follows the suggestions of Speiser (1964:367) who translates the word as “saddlebags.” In this they both follow an early study by Saarisalo (1927:92) who suggests, apparently based largely on analogy with his personal observation of the loading of asses in the south-eastern Galilee early in this century together with one possible meaning of the verbal form, šāpat, “to place,” that the word may best be explained as the double
harness upon which is placed the load on the beast’s back. While this possibility accords well with Schloen’s overall argument (see below), it should only be seen as a possibility. Either way Reuben was not a participant.

Stager suggests further that the pastoralism of Reuben and Gilead should be explained by reference to modern understandings of nomadic pastoralism, citing Khazanov’s (1984) description of the necessarily close economic relationship between nomadic and sedentary populations. To this we may add the work of Rowton (1973; 1974; 1976; 1977) who has demonstrated there is and has been a close symbiotic relationship between sedentary society and seasonally migrating pastoralist portions of the same or closely related social groups in many periods of Middle Eastern history. The points Stager draws from this line of reasoning are that the economy of the sheep/goat pastoralists lies behind the description in Judg 5. Reuben and Gilead were closely tied to the economies of sedentary groups and, therefore, they were described in the text as being less independent than other groups. Circumstances were portrayed as such that they were unable to sever their ties to permanently settled groups and, therefore, were unable to participate in the battle against the Canaanites (1988:228; 1989:63).

The final two groups who are described as not participating in the battle against the Canaanites are Dan and Asher. Stager translates the difficult key phrase of verse 17a, wēdan lammāh yāqūr ʿōnīyyôt, as “And Dan, why did he serve as a client on ships?” (1988:228; 1989:64). The chief problem here is the association of ʿōnīyyôt, ships, with Dan. According to the narrative history of Josh 19:40-48, Judg 1:34, and Judg 18, Dan was originally located in the low hill country of the Shephelah region in the south but later moved north to the headwaters of the Jordan River at the foot of
Mt. Hermon. The problem with both of these traditions is that the group is not depicted as being close enough to water of sufficient quantity to warrant any association with ships.

One possible solution is that at one time the territory of Dan actually extended as far as the Mediterranean or, at least, the city of Jaffa (as perhaps indicated by Josh 19:46). Yadin has suggested, in fact, that Dan is to be associated with one of the Sea People groups known as the Danuna or Denyen in Egyptian descriptions of troubles with foreign invaders at the end of the late Bronze Age (Yadin 1968). In this scenario Dan would have been originally a coastal people and the reference to “ships” perfectly sensible. Others have emended the text on the basis of parallels with Ugaritic and Arabic roots, repointed ḥnîyyồt into an adverbial accusative form, removed lâmmâh, and translated the passage with the sense of “Dan dwelt at ease” (Gray 1967:288; Craigie 1977:38-41; de Vaux 1978:780; Halpern 1983c:386).

Stager’s solution is to retain ḥnîyyồt, “ships,” and propose a sociological interpretation of yâgû̀r, “to dwell” or “sojourn,” which depends upon his understanding of the noun gêr. He argues, based in part on the observations of W. Robertson Smith (1894), that the gêr, “protected stranger” (Smith 1894:75), entered into a covenantal relationship with not only the one providing protection but also with the god of that person’s sanctuary, so that not only the individual but also the god became the stranger’s patron. The protected stranger, gêr, would thus become a client of the person offering protection and also a client of the temple of the local god where he might “sojourn,” yâgû̀r, or “live as a gêr” (Smith 1894:77). Moore (1910:385) interprets the gêr of Judg 17:7 in this way also, pointing out that such a person must be
understood to be a client of the person or family who provides him with protection (see also Stager 1988:230). Taking this idea further, Stager argues that the whole group of Dan was a “client tribe,” without long-term control of territory in the south and eventually forced to move to a new area in the north (Judg 1:34 and Judg 18). Therefore, he suggests that the people of Dan lived in close company with the inhabitants of the coastal plain who were not Israelites, serving them or hired by them as clients in the coastal shipping economy. Thus he translates, verse 17a, \( \text{wedan lammah yagur oneyot} \), as “And Dan, why did he serve as a client on ships?” (1988:228; 1989:64). His interpretation of this text, therefore, is that Dan is pictured being constrained by circumstances from participating with the other groups.

Judg 5:17b concerning Asher, \( 'asher yashab lehoph yammim we'al miprasayw yiškön \), is translated by Stager as, “Asher lived on the sea-coast and on its estuaries he stayed camped,” in a similar fashion (1988:228; see also Halpern 1983c:386). This verse, together with Judg 1:31-32, \( \text{wayyešeb ha'asher biqereb hakena'ani} \), “Asher lived among the Canaanites,” is interpreted by him to show that the people of Asher may have also worked or been clients with those who controlled shipping interests along the coast. Like the Danites, they were unable to join the tribes who fought against the Canaanites because of their social, economic, and cultic obligations and interests with people along the coast. Given these particular circumstances and their particular interests, they did not join the rest of the group.

Whereas Stager focuses on why certain groups named in Judg 5 did not join in the battle, Schloen (1993) examines and interprets the description of circumstances surrounding those who did join. He argues that the groups who participated were
united by particular interests. He suggests that the picture portrayed in the Song of Deborah is of the Canaanites who were disrupting caravan trade routes and thus hurting highland economic interests. Those groups who were hurt the most banded together to remove the threat to their interests (Schloen 1993:20).

The primary evidence for this point comes from verses 6-7 and 10-11. Schloen (1993:22) translates this passage as follows:

In the days of Shamgar son of Anat

in the days of Jael

Caravans48 and wayfarers held back49

Caravans travelled by round about routes.

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48 This is pointed in the Massoretic Text, ūrāḥōt. It occurs twice in verse 6 and is based on the root ṣḥ, "paths" or "ways" (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951). However, after the suggestion of G.F. Moore (1910) and followed by most scholars since, this same root may be repointed as ūrēḥōt, meaning "caravans." This suggestion is reflected in Boling’s commentary (1975) and in the New Revised Standard Version translation (1989).

49 The root ḥdl occurs three times in verses 6 and 7 in the Qal third person masculine plural verb form. The more common meaning of the verbal form, ḥädal, is "to cease" (Holladay 1971:96). The Arabic parallel, which preserves an early meaning, has the sense of "abstained from, neglected; held back from; left, forsook, deserted" or "refrain, hold oneself back from" (Thomas 1957:9-10). Later Arabic parallels have the sense of "to cease" (Thomas 1957:11). ḥdl also has a second less common sense of "to grow plump" or "to be, become prosperous," on the basis of Arabic ḥadula, "to be, become full, large, round, fat," especially of people and parts of the body (Thomas 1957:14; Calderone 1961:451; Holladay 1971:96). Chaney (1976) has made a strong case for the second meaning in these verses. Gottwald follows Chaney’s understanding of ḥdl and interprets Judg 5:6-7 ironically (1979:505-506). The caravans and caravaneering of the Canaanites were brought to an end by the successful military exploits of the Israelite peasantry who "grow fat" thanks to the leadership of such heroes as Deborah and Baraq and their victories in incidents such as described in the Song of Deborah. Schloen, on the other hand, takes the first meaning of the root ḥdl, "to cease, to hold back, to refrain" (Schloen 1993:23). In this he follows the interpretation of Lewis who questions the existence of ḥdl-II in Hebrew at all (1985). Lewis argues, following Thomas (1957), that the sense "cease" or "come to an end" is very rare and that the proper sense, corroborated by the Arabic and Targumic sources and biblical parallels, is in almost all cases, "to hold back" or "refrain from" (1985:107). Furthermore, as Lewis points out, Chaney’s translation requires taking the verb in the sense "to cease" in verse 6 and as "to grow plump" just one verse later (1985:108).
Villagers in Israel held back
They held back until you arose, Deborah
You arose as a mother in Israel.
The situation depicted by these verses is of disruptions in the economic circumstances of a group of villagers in Israel particularly with regard to travel and trade. Schloen's suggestion (1993) is that those who were affected by this situation thus banded together and were unified under the leadership of Deborah. The collective identity of this group, according to this interpretation of these verses, was the result of particular circumstances.

An additional picture of the situation is provided by Judg 5:8 which is another problematic verse. It may be translated as follows:

New gods were chosen
then there was war in the gates
Were shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

 Albright (1968:43, n.101) translated përâzôn, "warriors," on the basis of the Canaanite parallel in Papyrus Anastasi instead of the usual "villagers" or "peasants" based on Arabic parallels (see Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951; note also the discussion by Lemche 1985:278). Older commentaries (Moore 1910; Burney 1920; Gray 1967; and note also Gottwald 1979:506) reflect the "villagers" translation, whereas some more recent treatments followed Albright (Boling 1975; Craigie 1972; Coogan 1978; Freedman 1980). Some have suggested emending the text to rûzênîm, "rulers" (Gray 1967:279; see comments of Lemche 1985:278), arguing for both dittography and the similarity of p and r in paleo-hebrew script. However, Stager argues more soundly for a return to the earlier understanding of përâzôn, especially on the basis of parallels with the term, përâzôr, in Ezek 28:11, 1 Sam 6:18, Dt 3:5, Esth 9:19, and Zech 2:4, where it describes unwalled villages in contrast to fortified cities. In this interpretation përâzôn, "villagers," probably means the inhabitants of the përâzôr, "villages" (Stager 1988:224-225).
The textual traditions present conflicting evidence and their lack of agreement with what is preserved in the Massoretic text indicates a good deal of corruption and suggests that the ancient scribes also had difficulties with this phrase and its interpretation (see Burney 1920:117-120 and Gray 1967:280-281 for a discussion of the various traditions).

Most modern interpreters, however, take the verse as it stands in the Massoretic text and we will follow them in this, although their interpretations vary. Hillers points out that it seems to bear little connection with what immediately precedes or what immediately follows it (Hillers 1965:126). Nonetheless, Gray suggests that the verse reveals a theological view propounded by the Deuteronomistic historian that the general turmoil depicted in the book of Judges was due to religious apostasy and turning away from the one god of Israel (1967:280-281). Miller (1973) notes that the verse is obscure and corrupt and says nothing further. Coogan (1978) reads with the Massoretic text and makes no further comment and neither Gottwald (1979) nor Lemche (1985) examines the verse at all.\textsuperscript{51}

Boling suggests taking the text as it stands, finding the vocabulary of this verse consistent with the rest of the Song. Following on a comment by Mendenhall (1973:133, n.56), he would see the "new gods" as referring to deities who were witnesses and guarantors of treaty agreements between trading parties. He argues that

\textsuperscript{51} Cross suggests emendation, changing "\textit{lyhym}" to "\textit{ylm}" from "\textit{gods}" to "leaders" (Cross 1973:122, n.34). It may be that the relevant verb, \textit{yihbar}, a singular form, should be repointed in the plural, \textit{yibhärā}, "they chose" (Hillers 1965:124).
the context is one of "the collapse of trade route agreements and general security" and that this was the circumstance that brought about the general warfare described in the *Song of Deborah* (Boling 1975:109). This interpretation adds to our view of the general economic situation which is portrayed in Judg 5. As well, the reference to "new gods," ʾēlōhîm ḫâdāṣîm (Judg 5:8), may be a rather cryptic portrayal of a situation of religious conflict or tension that would imply circumstances such that groups were divided over their different religious allegiances. This may be an additional aspect to the picture of only some groups acting in concert in the situation of conflict. But with no additional details in the text in this regard, there is no other evidence to support an interpretation that groups were differentiated in accordance with their support for different gods.

The next point to consider is the general material circumstances depicted in the *Song of Deborah*. As Gottwald and Stager have pointed out, there is a clear dichotomy between rural and urban modes of existence and patterns of behaviour depicted in the text (Gottwald 1979:506; Stager 1988:222-223). These indications of different economic circumstances have definite implications for ethnicity.

The main hints we have of the material circumstances of the Israelite side of the battle come from the rich detail in the description of Jael and her surroundings. The material culture is decidedly that of a low-income rural producer of primary agricultural products (see, for example, Hopkins 1987). She lives in a "tent," ḥēl, and provides the fleeing Sisera with "milk," ḥālāb, and in the parallelism, "curds,"
hem'āh (Judg 5:24-25). The murder weapon is not a finely honed iron or bronze blade but a simple “tent peg,” yātēd, and “workman’s mallet,” halmūt 'āmēlīm (Judg 5:26). Indeed, as described from the Israelite point of view, this was a time when “shield,” māgēn, and “spear,” rōmah, were not seen in Israel (Judg 5:8).

The Israelite groups are not described as urbanites. Reuben, although chastised for not joining the battle, is associated either with trade or with pastoral nomadism depending on how one interprets hammišpētayim as “sheepfolds” or “hearth” or “saddlebags” (Judg 5:16). Naphtali is described as being on the “heights of the field,” mērōmē šādeh (Judg 5:18). The ones who participated are described as those who “came down,” yārad, into the valley for the battle against the Canaanites. Although there may be a certain figurative aspect to the use of this verb it can also be taken as an indication, along with the description of Naphtali, that the Israelites were people of the hill country. Certainly they were the ones who were outside and coming to battle against the city; they were not defending their city from attack (Judg 5:11).

The enemy’s material culture is depicted most clearly in the description of Sisera’s mother, the figure whose description poignantly balances that of Jael and who is the “bad mother” to Deborah’s “good mother.” She is a wealthy city dweller who lives in a house with fine secondary products for which she must be dependent on the energy of women such as Jael and her family. She watches for her son through a “window,” ḥallōn, and in the parallelism, a “lattice,” ḫēnāḇ (Judg 5:28). Her war-
rior son uses a “chariot” in battle, rekeb (Judg 5:28). The spoils of victory that she expected him to bring back included slaves, “a womb—a pair of wombs,” raḥam raḥāmātayim, “dyed fabric,” šēbā’īm, and “embroidered fabric,” riqmāh (Judg 5:30). Furthermore, the urban Canaanite woman is looking forward to a conspicuous display of the spoils of victory, “dyed stuff (and) a pair of embroidered pieces for the captor’s neck,” sebaʿ riqmātayim lēšawwēʾrē šālāl (Judg 5:30), a kind of behaviour not described for the Israelites. The general economic situation that we have argued is portrayed in Judg 5 is supported by these details. The Canaanites are pictured enjoying a material situation quite different from that of their enemies, who are portrayed as the victors in this battle. And, as described in the Song of Deborah, the different situations that are portrayed for the two sides in the conflict help to indicate and to define the identities of the two groups.

In addition to its primordial aspects, the references to ‘am in Judges 5:2 and 5:9 carry a social nuance, which is also present in the term’s usage in verses 11 and 13, and one which implies a more circumstantial aspect to its meaning. This is the word’s military connotation. Gottwald has pointed out how the covenantal agreement between the deity and the people often has military connotations (1979:242; see also Anderson 1970:150). Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the ‘am in Judges 5 refers exclusively to a military group. Boling, for example, suggests that ‘am refers to a particular group of people, the conquering military forces of Israel (1975:71,107). Miller also (1973:88-90) argues that the first line of Judg. 5:2 has to
do with warriors and the rituals of holy war and that in the second line of the verse the people are the warriors. However, Halpern (1981:190) points out that there are many other terms for the army of Israel (notably “men of Israel,” ‘aněšê yišrâ‘êl) and so ‘am need not refer to a military force. Although the people described in Judges 5 do indeed go to battle, they are not simply a military force.

The key point for our analysis is that the military context described by the Song is not primordial, but rather it is particular to the specific circumstances. The ‘am is not depicted as a military force which is a primordially defined and permanent fighting force but it is described as a group of people united for the particular situation. Given this context it seems that the military aspect of ‘am should be understood as a circumstantial and situational aspect of the identity of the group described in Judg 5 by this term.

The flexible aspect of ethnicity, that which responds to changing circumstances, is expressed in the Song of Deborah through the list of Israelite sub-groups who do participate in the conflict against the Canaanites in contrast to those who do not take part. The implication is that the lack of solidarity is because the different tribal groups had different interests. The details of material culture that the text describes for the victorious group and the defeated group are quite different and suggest that

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52 Cross (1975:17) makes the point even more strongly by emending the text to read, “great-hearted of the people,” by adding nēdîbê before ‘am on the basis of metrical integrity and a parallel phrase in Num. 21:18. It thus would indicate the “nobles” or “leaders” of the ‘am, the military commanders in the particular battle described in Judges 4 and 5.
they are tied to two different economic situations, urban and rural. Circumstances, as portrayed in Judg 5, thus are significant in the definition of group identity.

Conclusion

The image of ethnicity presented in Judges 5 indicates an identity and a unity that, in part, is primordial. It was based on devotion and allegiance to Yahweh, the primordial god of the people, a powerful deity from the region of Sinai whose theophany is described in verses 4 and 5. The deity’s presence is taken as an accepted fact by the Deuteronomistic framework. In addition, a name, yišrā’ēl, is used as the label for a community although, in this text, the exact composition and strength of relations between the various sub-groups of the collectivity is obscure. At least some of the people were described as a unity based on kinship, if we understand the use of the term ‘am correctly, and this understanding may have been applied, at least partially, to the people as a whole, as we see in the phrase ‘am yhwh.

However, although certain elements of this ethnic identity were expressed as a priori or primordial relations, other elements were articulated through the specific circumstances described in the text. Ethnic unity was expressed in the situation of a battle against the kings of Canaan over an issue which was described as having crystallized in the context of the general economic situation. The implication is that ethnicity may have been motivated in this instance by issues of trade and commerce.
Certainly the material circumstances of the Israelites as depicted in the text, those of low income rural producers of primary agricultural products, differ from the material circumstances depicted for the Canaanites. Note that it is the eponymous groups Zebulun, Naphtali, Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, and Issachar which are united in the conflict. Four other groups, Asher, Dan, Reuben, and Gad, are depicted as not acting in concert with the other six. The implication in the portrayal of these four is that they were tied to particular interests which kept them apart from an ethnic unity which included “all Israel.” Nonetheless, it seems that the writer did understand them to be a part of Israelite identity in some fashion, for they are rebuked for not taking part in the battle. But in the circumstances described in the Song of Deborah, six are united against the Canaanites.

A final point is that the text hints at possible closer relations between Israel and other groups, Midian, Amalek, Meroz, and the Kenites, which suggest that sharp ethnic distinctions may not have been drawn between these groups and Israel. Certainly Jael, a Kenite and the heroine of the story, was not a member of one of the traditional Israelite tribes and yet, in this context, she is described as acting for the good of those groups involved in the battle.
GIDEON

JUDGES 6:1 - 8:30
Gideon
Judges 6:1 - 8:30

Introduction

The exploits of Gideon, another of Israel's "judges," are portrayed vividly in Judges 6 through 8 in a narrative that is rich in descriptive detail. Called to be a deliverer or saviour by a messenger of God, cautious during the summons, devout in acceptance, victorious in battle, tenacious in pursuit, and humble in triumph, Gideon seems in many ways to be the epitome of an ideal Israelite leader. Indeed, there are many similarities between the story of this hero and the stories of other significant figures in the biblical history of Israel. Gideon's call is comparable to the call of Moses, fire consumes his sacrificial offering just as it does Elijah's, and Gideon is renamed Jerubbaal in much the same way Jacob is renamed Israel (see Auld 1989). And at the end of the Gideon narrative the people of Israel ask him to rule as a king over them, a request which befits such an ideal figure, but which also brings forward the issue of Yahweh's role in leading Israel and the whole question of kingship. These are also themes that lead naturally into the narrative of Judges 9 in which Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal/Gideon, attempts to establish himself as king over Israel from the city of Shechem.

Apart from the standard commentaries on Judges (Moore 1910; Burney 1920; Gray 1967; Boling 1975; Soggin 1981), the literature on Gideon has demonstrated a variety of approaches. Because these chapters seem very familiar with a whole range of biblical figures and because they are concerned with monarchical issues, many scholars have dated the core Gideon stories late, at least to the period of the monarchy. Auld argues they may be an even later supplement to the supplemental material
of Judges 17 to 21, and although he does not stipulate a specific date, he implies that it may be post-Deuteronomistic and as late as the Persian period (Auld 1989:266-267). In this, his work is closer to recent studies that treat the text more as a literary whole than as an ancient document written shortly after the events it describes. For example, Tanner (1992) and Webb (1987) both work with the text as a unit and deal more with literary than historical questions. There is a good body of literature, however, that deals with traditional concerns about the history of the text itself (see for example, Zimmermann 1952; Whitley 1957; and Haag 1967) and many other scholars have dealt with aspects of the history which the text depicts (for example, Malamat 1953; 1971; Tolkowsky 1925; Reviv 1977; de Vaux 1978). No one has employed a specifically anthropological approach.

The central topic of the narrative of Gideon ben Joash is the interaction between the people of Israel and the Midianites and, hence, we will find ample evidence for our analysis of ethnicity. We begin with the primordial features in the story.

Primordial Features

Names and kinship are the dominant primordial features. Religion and location are occasionally described in these terms as well. As we shall see, however, differences are expressed far more frequently in the context of particular circumstances described in the text.

As in other texts we have examined, names imply primordial distinctions as they are used as labels which, although not specified, suggest antecedent conditions which lie behind indicated differences between the groups of people named in the story. In the case of the Gideon narrative, Midian, midyân, constitutes such a group, indicated
by name specifically and described throughout chapters 6 through 8 as a people in conflict with Israel.

However, as in Judges 4, the general circumstances that the text depicts as being the cause of conflict between Israel and Midian are theological. According to Judges 6:1 and 6:10 Israel had not remained true to her covenant obligations to Yahweh and so he “gave them into Midian’s hand for seven years,” wayyittēnēm yhwh bēyad midyān šeba' šānîm (Judg 6:1). The Deuteronomist’s argument, then, is that ultimately Israel is responsible for the discord because of the people’s apostasy. They had committed what Boling calls a “sociopolitical offense” (1975:76) and failed to follow the leadership of Yahweh, their chief ruler. Furthermore they had turned away from Yahweh and followed the lead of other older and well-established local deities (Judg 6:10). The punishment meted out by Yahweh follows in logical fashion.

The clear implication is that if Israel had remained true to Yahweh’s commandments and stipulations then there would be no dispute between Israel and Midian. This does not carry a further implication that there would be no difference at all between the two groups. They are assumed to be distinct already and, indeed, primordially distinct. These verses simply argue that Israel’s apostasy has exacerbated differences and the conflict follows.

There are other points in the text, however, that depict a situation that was less metaphysical and more economic. Judges 6:3-6 mentions that when the Israelite farmers planted a crop, 'im zāra' yisra'ēl, it was destroyed by the Midianites, Amalekites and Easterners, specifically their livestock, miqnēhem, and including their camels, gēmallēhem (6:5). The result was that no means of living remained for Israel, wēlō' yaš'irū mihyāh bēyisra'ēl, neither sheep, ox, nor donkey, wēsheh wāsōr wahāmōr (6:4). Thus, according to Judges 6:6, Israel was “brought very low.”
wayyiddal yišrā'el mē'ōd (or "utterly destitute" as Boling translates 1975:124).

Indeed, Judges 6:2 describes Israel as having to make "hiding places," ham-minhārōt,\(^{53}\) in places where travel was difficult, in mountains, caves, and strongholds.\(^{54}\)

The situation that is depicted is one that implies that trade and economic issues were related to the interactions between Israel and the others. There are three indications of this. First is the location of the interaction. It is described as taking place near the eastern end of the Jezreel valley. Gideon and his forces are situated at the spring of Harod, 'ēn hārōd, on the south side of the hill of Moreh, gib'at hammōreh, which divides the broad plain of Jezreel at this point into northern and southern outlets (Judg 7:1). Gideon and the Abiezerites are in Ophrah, possibly the site of 'Affuleh on the south side of Moreh, in the main route from the Jordan valley and the

\(^{53}\) This is a hapax legomenon that occurs only in the plural. If it is related to the Arabic minhāra, "a place hollowed out by water," it may indicate deeply eroded ravines, crevices, or caves. If, however, it comes from the root nāhar, "to shine, beam light," it may have the sense of "beacon-posts" (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1977:626; Gray 1967:294). Boling suggests the root, nhr, implies a water eroded ravine or cleft in the mountains and hence translates it "dens" (1975:122).

\(^{54}\) A number of biblical scholars with historical interests have interpreted this as an indication of raids by marauding bands of desert nomads. Gray, for example, suggests: "The whole situation is paralleled in periodic Bedouin raids till as late as the early days of the British Mandate, in face of which there were regular watchers of crops and signal stations on prominent hills" (1967:295; see also Moore 1910:178; Burney 1920:185). This interpretation, of course, begs the whole question as to why the nomadic groups encountered by nineteenth-century explorers raided settled lands at all. More recent research on nomadism of the Middle East has shown that nomadic or semi-nomadic herders existed in close relationship to sedentary villagers and farmers (Rowton 1974; 1976; see also Gottwald 1979:435-463). In other words, raiding of settled area by nomads is not a typical and "natural" practice. Therefore, the Midianites, Amalekites, and Easterners likely were not raiding Israelite agricultural land simply as an end in itself. Indeed, Garstang (1931) discusses a slightly different context for the aggression. He argues that, "Their incursions into Palestine would appear to have been not so much an organised raid of warring tribes, as a general movement of nomads in search of food and pasture, impelled maybe by the failure of the rains in their own districts and profiting by the breakdown of Egyptian authority" (Garstang 1931:318). While Garstang's interpretation adds the political factor as a motivating element, he still implies that the presence of the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East in Gideon's territory was a natural migratory process.

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site of Beth Shean at the south-eastern outlet of the Jezreel (Aharoni 1979:263).

Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East are located in the northern outlet of the Jezreel on the north side of the hill of Moreh (Judg 7:1). Psalm 83:9-10 locates the battle specifically at the spring En-Dor which is located on the north side of Moreh (Aharoni 1979:263). By describing Gideon and his clan in this location, the Deuteronomist depicts a difference between Israel and Midian marked by the difference in location. And since the Jezreel Valley is the setting of the story and it is a significant trade route, the picture given in the story of competition over access to the valley suggests competition over the economy of trade.

The second indication that trade and commerce may have been the key circumstance is the brief reference to Gaza in Judges 6:4.\(^55\) It is important to note, however, that Gaza is at the Mediterranean end of a major southern communication and trade route along the Beersheba valley. Like the Jezreel in the north, this valley connected the coast with trade routes in the rift valley. The claim in Judges 6:4 that Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East were destroying the produce of the land as far as Gaza depicts a difference between Israel and the group of three and implies a similarity with the situation in the Jezreel.

The references to the camels of the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East is the third indication that trade was possibly an important issue in this particular situation.\(^56\) The picture described by the Deuteronomist is that the people who

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\(^55\) Most commentators feel this is anachronistic. Burney, for example, suggests it may be due to a later editor who drew a parallel with incursions into Israelite land by southern nomads many years later (1920:185-186). Gray feels it may be a cryptic indicator for the western slopes of Israelite land along the coastal plain highway which went down to Gaza (1967:295). Presumably then this would be intended as a further indication of the resistance the Israelites encountered as they settled the land.

\(^56\) The camel was not domesticated until the last part of the second millennium B.C.E. (Zarins 1992). While it was probably first used domestically for its primary products, such as meat and milk, and its secondary products such as hides and hair, by the end of the late Bronze Age it was also used as a beast
entered the Jezreel valley and who came up against Gideon and the Israelites were traders.

In summary, the economic interests depicted in Judg 6-8 help to define the difference between Gideon’s group and the others. Midian, Amalek, and the bênê qedem were people usually situated on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Judges 6 to 8 depicts them in this situation as entering the Jezreel Valley, a major communication route, with herds of camels. In addition, they are not described following the easiest route through the valley which lies south of the hill of Moreh but which, in this case, is held by Gideon and the Israelites. Rather, they are depicted as taking the route lying north of Moreh in an area which is apparently not controlled as securely. Furthermore, they are described as also being in the area of Gaza, a coastal city at the western end of another important trade route with connections through the rift valley to the production areas in the Arabian peninsula. It therefore appears that, as with the situation depicted in Judges 4 and 5, the general circumstances described in the story of Gideon which serve to separate Gideon and his followers from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east have to do with trade and economic issues. Competition over control of the valley is, in this case, the situation which separates the two groups and the differences between them are further emphasized by the conflict.

One of the other groups named in conjunction with the Midianites, the Amalekites, ʿâmalîq, have been discussed already in the context of Judges 5 and we need only repeat here that they, like Midian, are depicted as traditional enemies of Israel.

of burden (Zarins 1992; see also Knauf 1988:10).
The “people of the East,” bêné qedem, appears to represent a more generic term for the inhabitants of the semi-desert areas on the fringes of arable land to the east and south-east of the Israelite highlands. Boling sees the references as a summarizing phrase which parallels the two terms “Midian” and “Amaleq” (Boling 1975:125).57 Both names constitute labels which were used in the text in order to oppose a group of people to the Israelites.

A further point is that the three groups, Midian, Amaleq, and the “people of the East,” are mentioned together in Judges 6:3 and 33, midyân waʾâmâlēq ēbêné qedem, and in 7:12, midyân waʾâmâlēq wēkôl bêné qedem. That the three groups are mentioned in unison as something of a triumvirate when, in fact, the narrative deals primarily with a conflict between Midian and Israel, suggests that the references to Amalek and the “people of the East” are related less to the particular circumstances of the conflict described in Judges 6 to 8 and more to primordial distinctions between the Israelites and neighbouring peoples. The fact the writer understood all of these groups were to be enemies of Israel may explain why they were joined together as a collectivity. All were foes as opposed to friends. The text assumes that this linkage is intelligible to the reader and so the further details and context of the relationship are not supplied.

The one case that would seem to mitigate against this observation is Judges 8:10. Gideon is described as surprising the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, along with their remaining force which is called, “the camp of the people of the East,” maḥānēh bêné qedem. One might expect a different phrase to have been used

57 Knauf (1992) suggests that in Judges 6-8, bêné qedem does not refer to any specific population from the period of history described by the text, but rather to raiding camel nomads of the 6th century and later and familiar to the Deuteronomist.
such as, “the camp of Midian,” *mahānēh mīdyān*, such as occurs in Judges 7:1, 8, 13, 14, 15. The use of “people of the East” in Judges 8:10 may indicate that it was a generic descriptive phrase for enemies from the eastern desert fringe in general, including Midian and Amaleq. However, from a different perspective it could be suggested that the “people of the East” were a specific enemy of Israel on another occasion and that the remembrance of this conflict was linked here to the tradition of the Midianite battle. Either way, Judges 8:10, like the other references to *bēnē qedem*, is primordial because the details of the circumstances of this particular battle are focused more on Midian than on the “people of the East” and this phrase is used as an *a priori* identifier to describe traditional enemies of Israel.

There is one isolated and rather enigmatic reference to the “gods of the Amorites,” *'ēlōhē hā'ēmōrî*, in Judges 6:10. Boling highlights that the Deuteronomistic writer used this phrase in order to explain in theological terms the problem Israel and Gideon faced with the attack from the Midianites and the “people of the East” (Boling 1975:126-127). They and their religion represented to the Deuteronomistic writer all that the Israelites should have rejected in giving their allegiance to Yahweh. The fact that Israel did not reject the “gods of the Amorites” completely, according to the Deuteronomist, resulted in the situation of conflict with Midian, Amalek, and the “people of the East.” This is a formulaic statement which, according to the text, refers to a long-standing distinction between the two peoples and, therefore, it is primordial.

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58 According to the received historical view, the Amorites, literally “Westerners,” were third- and second-millennium inhabitants of northern and western regions of the fertile crescent (Mendenhall 1992a).
The genealogical details of Gideon are also a primordial feature. He is specified as the son of Joash of the clan of Abiezer of the tribe of Manasseh (Judg 6:11; 8:32). The name of Abiezer, 'ābi'ezer, stems from the clan's ancestor, one Abiezer, who, according to biblical genealogical information given elsewhere (1 Chr 7:18) was one of the great-grandsons of the Israelite ancestor Manasseh. His name then became the patronym for one of the families of the tribe named after the patriarch Manasseh (Josh 17:2). These references to the primordial roots of Gideon apparently serve, in part, to legitimize him as an Israelite saviour figure. They tie him to the earlier history of Israel and link him to an ancestral structure which, from the point of view of the text, was essentially timeless. According to the argument presented by these details, Gideon, the Abiezerite of the tribe of Manasseh, is clearly a proper leader for the battle against Midian. His association with Manasseh and with Israel, bēnē yišrā'ēl, is a primordial given, established because of the fact of his birth within this family.

The locational details in the stories of Gideon are indicators of difference. Apart from the general picture that Israel is situated primarily in land on the western side of the Jordan River and Midian, Amaleq, and the "people of the East" are situated primarily in land on the eastern side of the Jordan River, most of the the geographical details are depicted in the context of the particular circumstances narrated in the story.

According to Judges 6:2, because of the situation with Midian, Israel made "hiding places," minhārōt, in the "mountains," hārīm, "caves," mē'ārot, and

59 Or "beacons." See previous footnote.
“strongholds,” *mēṣādōt.* The implication is that Israel took up positions of defensive strength in more secluded and mountainous areas, such as in the range of Mount Gilboa on the south side of the Jezreel valley.

A further indication of this situation is in Judges 6:11. Gideon is depicted as “beating out wheat in the wine press,” *ḥōbēt ḫīṭṭīm baggat.* This is not the standard technique for threshing wheat which usually takes place on a “threshing floor,” *gōren,* a large open and usually public place outside of the town (Borowski 1987:62-63). As the text describes, Gideon’s technique, that of beating, *ḥōbēt,* handfuls of ripe wheat, which probably was done with a stick, *šēbet or maṭṭeh* (see Isaiah 28:27), occurred in a winepress, *gat.* This is not an exposed and public winepress, *yeqeb,* outside of a town in the area where the vines were planted which is often mentioned in conjunction with the public threshing floor, *gōren* (Borowski 1987:111). Rather, the *gat* was a stone and plastered installation likely placed within a town and thus not as exposed to public view as the threshing floor outside of the town walls (Borowski 1987:111).

There are other geographical details, however, which do not support completely the picture implied by Judges 6:2 and 6:11 of a people forced to live only in seclusion in the hills. Gideon’s town, Ophrah, as we have already pointed out, was likely the site of ‘Affuleh, located on the south side of the hill of Moreh in the southern outlet of the Jezreel valley (Aharoni 1979:263). This site is in the valley itself and well situated to command access through this outlet down to the city of Beth Shean on the Jordan. It is hardly in a secluded location. Furthermore, once Gideon has taken up

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60 The root for this term, *swd,* relates to “hunting” and *so mēṣādōt* likely refers to hunting places or secluded places from which game could be hunted (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1977).
the pursuit he is described as chasing the Midianites well out of the Jezreel, into the Jordan valley, across the Jordan river, and into areas that are generally understood to be in the eastern desert of what today is the kingdom of Jordan (Judg 7:22-28; 8:10-11; Aharoni 1979:264; Garstang 1931:321-323). This apparent wide-ranging freedom of movement does not sustain completely the image of Israel being forced to hide in mountains and caves because of pressure from Midian.

In terms of circumstantial distinctions that are depicted between the Israelites and their enemies, however, these locational details agree. They describe a situation whereby the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East were positioned primarily in transportation routes along valleys, road-ways, and passes, while Israel was located primarily in mountainous terrain or in cities and towns in or near the trade routes. The two groups were distinct as depicted in the situation described in the text.

In summary, we have seen that the names of Israel's enemies are presented in a primordial fashion as labels for groups which are depicted as traditional enemies of Israel. Likewise, Gideon's genealogy establishes his legitimate place in the historical hierarchy of Israelite society and distinguishes him from non-Israelite leaders. The remaining points we will discuss describe differences between the Israelites and others only in terms of particular circumstances.

Circumstantial Features

Distinctions between groups and individuals that are described in the context of particular circumstances predominate in Judges 6 through 8. We have already discussed the circumstantial aspects of group interaction and spatial descriptions and we turn now to the remaining features in the story that depict differences in terms of cir-
cumstances.

An additional area where differences are depicted is in the economic and material circumstances of the groups. Gideon and the Israelites are described as farmers in Judges 6 to 8. The result of the action by Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East, according to Judges 6:4, was that no means of livelihood remained in Israel. Specifically this is said to include sheep, oxen, and asses. As we have already discussed, Gideon is pictured threshing wheat by hand in a wine press. He prepares a meal for the messenger of Yahweh in Judges 6:18-21. It consists of the meat of a “kid,” gēdî ‘izzîm, and “unleavened bread cakes,” ʿēpat qemah maṣṣōt. Gideon’s sacrifice on the new altar he builds for Yahweh is a “bull,” par haṣṣōr (Judg 6:25-28). As one of Gideon’s tests before Yahweh he lays out on the ground a “fleece,” gizzat haṣṣemer, to collect the night dew (Judg 6:36-40). As well, Gideon’s picked 300 troops hide their torches in jars, a standard storage container in the small agricultural settlements found throughout the Israelite highlands (Judg 7:16, 20). And finally, the saying Gideon uses to appease the disgruntled Ephraimites is one that draws on an agricultural idiom: “Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?” (Judg 8:2b). Clearly the text depicts the Israelites as farmers and settled people.

This is not the case for the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the East. They are described as caravaneers and pastoralists not living in a permanent town or city environment but in tents (Judg 6:5). The description of the physical circumstances of the two people’s lifestyles shows them to be distinct.

In addition to the details which indicate the different economic circumstances of the two groups, the easterners are differentiated from the Israelites by items of material decoration. The camels of the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, are
described as being adorned with “crescents,” šahrônîm (Judg 8:21, 26), “pendants,” nêtpôt (Judg 8:26), and “collars,” ‘ãnâqôt (Judg 8:26). The kings themselves are depicted as wearing the traditional cloaks of “purple,” bigêdê hâ’argâmân (Judg 8:26) that were worn by royalty or persons of high status and wealth (e.g., Est 8:15). As well, the easterner army wore personal decorations of “gold earrings,” nîzmê zâhâb (Judg 8:24-26). The text, presenting this as a significant marker of ethnic difference, explains the adornments with the statement that they were “Ishmaelites,” yišmê‘êlim (Judg 8:24).

The material circumstances of the Israelites and their enemies are depicted quite differently in the text. The Israelites are characterized as settled farmers and the details in the story support this picture. On the other hand, the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East are described as having a different situation, that of mobile caravaneers.

In addition to the overarching Deuteronomistic theological framework discussed above, that is, that the apostasy of the Israelites was the reason for the Israelite’s conflict with the peoples of the east, there are other descriptions of what we may call religious circumstances. These also help serve to demarcate the Israelites as a distinct ethnic group, although the distinctions between the religion of Israel and the religion of her enemies are not specified. The overall argument of the text is clear, however. Israel, according to the situation which the text describes, achieved success over the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East because of Gideon and his unique relationship to Yahweh. In other words, Israel was the victor and, hence, superior to and separate from the others because of her special situation.

In the theophany at the beginning of Gideon’s story, Judges 6:11-32, an “angel of the Lord,” mal’ak yhwh, appears to Gideon by the “oak at Ophrah” (Judg 6:11).
This is not an established communication that reflects a primordial understanding of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Rather, it is described as an event that is unique to a particular occasion and, we are told, it is because of this that Gideon is set apart as the one to deliver Israel from its trouble. This is the key narrative point which motivates the remainder of the story of Gideon.

Once the Lord’s messenger informs Gideon that the Lord is with him (Judg 6:12), however, Gideon questions the basis of that statement in light of the particular circumstances. In fact, Gideon is portrayed as challenging the primordial assumptions of Israel’s relationship to Yahweh. In verse 13 he briefly rehearses the primordial history, tersely mentioning the flight from Egypt and the wonderful acts of Yahweh that the ancestors had recounted. He then contrasts that with the current situation and asks how the Lord can be with Israel when they are dominated by Midian (Judg 6:13).

Furthermore, the story of Gideon finishes with a postscript which pictures him making an ephod, מֵעֶפֶן, in opposition to the stipulations of a good covenant relationship with Yahweh (Judg 8:27). Indeed, the text passes judgment on Gideon and Israel, saying they “prostituted themselves,” וַעֲיִיתוּן, before it and it became to them a “snare,” מֵעֶפֶן. This foreshadows the protracted problems for Israel that the Deuteronomist continues to portray through the book of Judges. It is also a further description of a situational, as opposed to primordial, view of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh.

The details of Israelite religion are described throughout Judges 6 - 8 predominantly in terms of the particular circumstances. However, Judges 6:8-10 is

61 This is an object of cultic significance often associated with oracular decisions (de Vaux 1961).
one section that does present a view of Israel’s religion in primordial terms. Here, the text relates that God sent a “prophet,” ʿīš nābiʾ, to the Israelites and this figure presented to them a formulaic theological statement of the past and how Israel had turned away from strict adherence to the word of God. The prophet summarizes for Israel, bēnē yišrāʾēl, their primordial history; how Yahweh brought Israel up out of Egypt and out of slavery, rescued them, gave them the land, and directed them not to worship the “gods of the Amorites,” ʾēlōhē hāʾēmōrī (Judg 6:8-10). Then they are berated for having “not listened to my voice,” wēlōʾ šēmaʾtem bēqōlî. This statement correlates with the opening verse of Judges 6, “The Israelites,” bēnē yišrāʾēl, “did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh gave them into the hand of Midian,” yad midyān, “for seven years” (Judg 6:1). Thus, in the view of the Deuteronomist, the reason for the conflict with Midian is a theological one and circumstantial. Israel, in this situation, has reneged on the primordially established relationship with Yahweh, a relationship which sets Israel apart from other groups.

There are additional situations that help to describe the group’s identity in terms of religion. The malʾak yhwh appoints Gideon to be a “saviour,” the one who will deliver Israel from the situation of oppression by the Midianites (ḥōšaʾtāʾ et yišrāʾēl,

62 Note the similarity of this statement to the primordial reference to Sinai in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:4-5) and to a longer rehearsal of primordial history in the narrative of Jephthah (Judg 11:12-28).

63 Evidence that Judges 6:8-10 is a passage inserted into the Gideon traditions by a later editorial hand is provided by the Qumran text fragment 4QJudg a (Barrera 1989). In this fragment, Verses 7 to 10 are absent. Barrera concludes that these verses cannot have been part of the earliest compositional level of the narrative but were most likely a later addition which included various typical Deuteronomistic formulae (1989:238). 4QJudg a is an important witness that this rehearsal of the primordial salvation history of Israel may not have been a central theme of the earliest stories of Gideon. It is possible that these verses were the work of a writer or editor for whom the relationship of the Israelites to Yahweh was a primordial relationship, whereas an earlier writer of the story of Gideon treated only the particular circumstances of Gideon’s religious experiences and practices, but a solution to this issue is beyond the parameters of the current study.
Judges 6:14). As with the other major "judge" figures, Gideon's position is not a primordial post, but it is specific to the particular circumstances and the text emphasizes the conditionality of the appointment. Indeed, Gideon is depicted as protesting that within the permanent social structures of Israel and, in particular, within the group of Manasseh, his clan, 'elep, is the weakest, dal (Judg 6:15). Furthermore, Gideon protests that he is the weakest individual within his own group (Judg 6:15). Obviously, what is described is an "office" that Gideon does not take up as a permanent position within a primordially established social framework. Rather, the text describes a specific situation in which a more enduring social order is bypassed. The weakest individual of the weakest unit is singled out to be a leader in this particular situation.

As depicted here, the appointment of Gideon as saviour does not depend on a primordially established social order. In fact, his position is just the opposite. The picture is not of a society where the social hierarchy was well defined so that the leader of the group came from the permanent structures and order of the society. Rather, it was someone from the periphery of the group's hierarchy who becomes the leader. Gideon's designation in this role is an indication of the circumstantial nature of the group's leadership and, by extension, its collective identity as represented by this leader.

The uniqueness of the particular situation described in the story of Gideon is emphasized also by the interaction between Gideon and Yahweh's messenger. The point that, in this particular situation, Yahweh will remain close to Gideon and Israel is made clear in Judges 6:16 (‘ehyeh ‘immāk). Relations between the people and their deity will not, in this case, depend on a primordially established relationship. Success will come about because of Yahweh's presence in these circumstances.
Furthermore, the depiction of Gideon’s responses to the messenger does not describe regularized ritualistic practice as one would expect if the group and its definition were already established and dependent on primordial features. Rather, this is a unique occasion and Gideon is pictured preparing a special meal in thanks and as a test of the messenger’s truthfulness in this special situation (vs. 17-21).

Similarly, Gideon’s sacrificial offering of one of his father’s bulls constitutes a new practice in new circumstances. In addition, it results in the overthrow of the traditional, or primordial, altar to Baal. The depiction of Gideon’s surreptitious destruction of the predominant icons of Canaanite religion, the Asherah and altar of Baal, and then his construction and sacrifice on a new altar to Yahweh is, in part, a key ethnic indicator. What is pictured in this text is the change from a Canaanite religious order to a new, Israelite, religious order which is particular in this case to the circumstances. The primordial traditions are overturned. Gideon, depicted as the weakest of the weak, communicates with a god who has not received the complete allegiance of the other members of the group, is appointed a saviour, and acts as a religious reformer. But his calling and his responses are all cast in terms of the particular situation. The new definition of the group’s religious affiliation is sensible only in this particular context. It represents a newer formulation and definition of the group’s identity.

The picture of Gideon’s scepticism, his testing of Yahweh’s messenger, and his need for proof of God’s power mitigate against seeing the relationship between Yahweh and the people as static and traditional. The images are of the process of ethnic

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64 Emerton (1978) argues that haššôr may be understood as “finest” or “high ranking” on the basis of a similar Arabic and Syriac root.
identity formation within the group itself and not just through conflict with other groups. Although the opening contact between the messenger and Gideon makes reference to the primordial history of Yahweh’s role in the creation of the group (Judg 6:8-10), in all that follows the portrait is of a relationship that is unique to the particular circumstances. Indeed, the text describes a situation where the primordial is not taken-for-granted and, indeed, is questioned. The picture is of a people defining their relationship to a particular deity in a particular context. They thus become the “people of Yahweh” as opposed to the “people of Asherah” or the “people of Baal” and their battle cry is now a cry for Yahweh and for Gideon (Judg 7:18,20).

The shift is signified as well by Gideon’s name change (Judg 6:32). In the context of this narrative, the new name for Gideon symbolizes in part the shift in his status from the weakest of the weakest clan to the “saviour” of the whole group. It may also be indicative of the new definition of the group’s identity for they are no longer followers of Baal, as is suggested by Gideon’s new name, yērubba‘al, Jerubbaal, which the Deuteronomist describes as meaning, “Let Baal struggle against him,” yāreb bō habba‘al (Judg 6:32).

A final point about the particular circumstances depicted in the narrative of Gideon’s battle with the eastern peoples is that in Judges 6:34-35 and 7:23 Gideon’s kin-based extended group, the Abiezzerites and the rest of Manasseh, together with Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, are the key participants. Later on in the story, Ephraim is included as well (Judg 7:24).

The fact that these groups are named may be significant in the light of our view that trade and the economic circumstances were important factors in the conflict.

65 Such changes commonly mark rites of passage and signify the change in status of an individual within a society (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969a; 1969b).
Asher and Zebulun were both coastal groups at the western end of the Jezreel Valley while Naphtali controlled the hills on the northern side of the valley, opposite Manasseh. That Gideon is pictured calling upon groups to participate in the conflict who were located on either side of the Jezreel is a further indication that the trade situation was a significant factor in the conflict.

The negotiated nature of group identity in the context of particular circumstances is illustrated by the Ephraimites’ complaint to Gideon in Judges 8:1-3. They are depicted criticizing Gideon for not including them in the original call to battle (Judg 6:35). Gideon is pictured placating the Ephraimites: “Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?” (Judg 8:2). Ephraim stays, participates in the conflict, and is included within the boundaries of the group. The unity of the force against the “people of the East,” bêné qedem, is successful. This incident thus describes debate and negotiation within the group about appropriate action and protocol in the particular situation. The order and status of sub-groups within the whole are not primordially defined but are negotiated just as are the boundaries of the group with its outside neighbours.

Furthermore, as in Judges 5, the text does not depict all of the sub-groups of Israel taking part in the conflict.67 It is an indication that the Deuteronomistic historian’s portrayal of the definition of the group “Israel” depended, at least in part, upon the circumstances that the story depicted. Who was included and who was left out appears to have been flexible. This clearly indicates the circumstantial aspect to

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66 Note that Asher did not participate in the battle portrayed in Judges 5 because, like the group of Dan (Stager 1988), they were obligated to maintain their alliance with the shipping interests along the coast.

67 On the implications for Israelite history, see Halpern (1983b), p.172: “But the absence of pan-Israelite action, determined by purely historical considerations, does not imply the absence of a people, or community, Israel. It implies at worst the loose, decentralized nature of its political structures.”
the definition of who was a member of the group. In the situation portrayed in the story of Gideon, it was a coalition of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Ephraim.

Conclusion

The key ethnic descriptors in the narrative of Gideon ben Joash include features that the text describes in terms of both primordial traditions and the specific situation. Kin relationships, and a brief mention of the primordial history of Israel's founding ancestors,68 constitute the only significant primordial traditions recorded in this narrative.

The overall situation is described in terms of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. The typical Deuteronomistic agenda presents the view that the conflict between Israel and Midian is due to Israel's inadequacies in remaining true to their god. Their apostasy results in their oppression. Their salvation, through Gideon, comes from their god. Once visited by Yahweh's messenger, he is transformed from the lowest of the low to a saviour, he overturns the images of traditional Canaanite religion, sacrifices to Yahweh instead, and gains the victory. The message is clear: we who worship Yahweh will have victory over others who worship Baal and Asherah. It is through these particular religious circumstance that, in the narrative, boundaries are drawn around the group and it is through the specific conflict with Midian and the bēnê gedem that the Deuteronomist makes the point that insiders wor-

68 Though, on the evidence of 4QJudg and as we have already pointed out, these particular verses may be a later addition.
ship Yahweh while outsiders worship other deities.

As well, the picture of particular economic and geographic circumstances helps delineate who is Israelite and who is not. Gideon and the groups that met the threat with him are portrayed as poor agriculturalists in the hills around the Jezreel Valley. As in Judges 4 and 5, the situation is that they were attempting to control the trade route along the valley and the flow of goods carried by the caravans of Midian and the bēnê qedem and, according to the tale described by the Deuteronomist, the economic circumstances were a key factor leading to the battle and an important element differentiating Israel and significant in defining her ethnic boundaries.

What the story of Gideon portrayed was a people creating and maintaining religious and economic distinctiveness in a situation of conflict with neighbouring groups. In those circumstances, particular boundaries were depicted: Israel was different economically and religiously.
ABIMELEK

JUDGES 8:30 - 9:57
Abimelek
Judges 8:30 - 9:57

Introduction

Abimelek, the son of Gideon (Judg 8:31; or in Judg 9:1, Jerubbaal) by an unnamed woman from the city of Shechem, follows in the footsteps of his father as a leader in Israel, according to the picture presented by Judges 9. However, Abimelek is neither a "judge," šōpēt, nor a "saviour," mōši’ař, the usual terms used to describe the "Judges," rather, he is called a "king," melek (Judg 9:6). Indeed, the narrative appears to focus primarily on internal political issues and to describe an early experiment with kingship that, in the end, fails.

Research into the historical situation depicted in Judges 8:30 - 9:57 has largely focused on the political aspect. The motivating question has been to determine what the text indicates about political evolution within Israel. Maly argues that it describes an "unnatural development" in Israel's political history and represents a condemnation by later commentators of a poor choice for monarch (Maly 1960). Boling (1975:184) suggests that the story shows the attempt by Gideon and Abimelek to consolidate and solidify power over the nascent nation-state around the important northern city of Shechem. Halpern (1978; 1983b) supports this view and argues that the event of Abimelek's failed rule was what motivated the shaping of Israelite political structure into "a system of non-monarchic leadership based on local militias" (1983b:229-230; see also Garstang 1931). Soggin sees it as a picture of "... conflicts over power and competence between what today we would call the legislative power (the assembly) and the executive power (the sovereign)" (1981:163). Gray (1986:212) suggests the text depicts tension between two classes in Shechem, one supporting the rule of
Abimelek and the other aligning themselves with Gaal and his supporters (Judg 9:26).

Other writers have been concerned more with the theological implications of this attempt at rule vested in the hands of a single person. Boling (1975:185) makes the point that a Deuteronomistic political and theological agenda that was antagonistic to rule from any centre other than Jerusalem may have been behind this portrait of failure. Klein (1988) too, although focused primarily on literary features in the text, highlights the role of Abimelek as an “anti-judge,” a figure who, although of the seed of Gideon, a paradigmatic “good” leader in early Israel, ultimately brings about “evil” through the destruction of two Israelite cities, the death of many Israelites, and the weakening of Israel’s relationship to Yahweh.

Many have focused on the history of the text itself and on its apparently composite structure. They have attempted to determine which are the oldest and most authentic sections of the narrative and to put the separate sections in chronological order (for example, Whitley 1957; Fritz 1982). Others have emphasized features in the text that can be compared to similar materials in writings from other cultures in the Near East (Gevirtz 1963; Wright 1970).

Some recent authors have emphasized the text as a literary whole. For example, Boogaart (1985) presents an analysis of the theme of retribution, suggesting that Abimelek’s “crime” of murdering his half-brothers on a “single stone” is balanced perfectly by his own death beneath the upper mill-stone dropped on his head by the woman in Thebez (Judg 9:53). Janzen (1987) agrees with this approach but suggests that the balance proposed by Boogaart is not so exact. In his rhetorical analysis, Janzen argues that the narrative elements used to describe Abimelek’s rise to power are also used to describe his downfall. As he puts it: “One who would rule Shechem single-handedly as its head (v.37), and who to that end killed seventy brothers upon
a single stone, in the end is killed by a single woman who drops a mill-stone upon (‘al) his head” (1987:35). No scholar has taken a specifically anthropological approach to an interpretation of the story of Abimelek.

The interactions depicted in this story take place between individuals and groups associated with the city of Shechem. There are no participants who are categorized as Israelite enemies from other locations (e.g., Midian). Furthermore, the city of Shechem and its inhabitants are treated with ambiguity. On the one hand, the text describes them as willing participants in Abimelek’s alliance and yet, on the other hand, they are pictured acting independently. Given our focus on expressions of ethnic processes, however, this story does have something to offer with regard to our analysis of ethnically significant interaction even though the focus of the narrative is on debate within, as it is described by the Deuteronomist, the Israelite community. We begin with the primordial elements.

Primordial Features

The overall situation depicted in the narrative of Abimelek appears to focus on what amounts to an internal Israelite debate, or, a family feud, over the question of leadership. Within the context of this overarching circumstance, there are several features expressed in primordial terms that identify and separate the participants.

A significant indicator of ethnicity is kinship. Abbreviated genealogies are given for a number of key characters in the narrative in a form stating the father’s name together with the son’s name. One such figure is Jotham son of Jerubbaal, yôtâm ben yêrubba‘al, the youngest son of Gideon (Jerubbaal) who is described as the only survivor of Abimelek’s purge (Judg 9:5). It is Jotham who, from the top of Mt.
Gerizim, delivers the fable of the trees choosing a ruler and supplies an interpretation of the moral of the story (Judg 9:8-20). The narrator's final condemnation of Abimelek (Judg 9:57) harkens back to this fable and refers to the "curse," qilēlat, of Jotham son of Jerubbaal. In part, it is this primordial kin relationship that justifies Jotham's critique of Abimelek's rule. The sole survivor of the purge, the implication is perhaps that his critique of Abimelek carries more weight because he is of the same family. Or, from another perspective, the point is that Jotham's counter-argument carries as much primordial authority as does Abimelek's argument given that they are both from the same family. The force of these primordial points, however, are made in the context of a debate over leadership, which will be examined in more detail below.

Another figure identified by kinship is Gaal son of Ebed, ga'âl ben 'êbed,69 who challenges Abimelek's rule over Shechem (Judg 9:26, 28, 30, 31, 35). Boling raises some interesting points regarding Gaal's genealogy and his relationship to the people of Shechem. In his taunt to the people of Shechem, Gaal is depicted asking if the son of Jerubbaal, that is, Abimelek, and Zebul his officer served Hamor the father of Shechem (Judg 9:28). According to Gen 33:19 and Gen 34:2, Hamor was the father of Shechem. As Boling points out (1975:176), Gaal is pictured attempting to

69 There is a variant of the name in the LXXB which has Ιωβηλ, lobel. Soggin suggests that this is simply due to a common confusion in Greek between Δ and Δ, so that lobel is really lobed, a good transliteration for the MT Hebrew 'bd, 'êbed, "servant" (1981:184). However, Boling feels that the LXXB may preserve a Greek version of the theophoric name, yôba'âl or yôbê'l, meaning "Yahweh is lord," or the like (1975:176). In his view, this is a further indication of the syncretism present at this time in Shechem where the cult combined Israelite Yahwistic worship with that of Canaanite El or Baal worship, and he suggests that the full name was possibly something like, g'l bn 'bd bn ywb'l (Boling 1975:176). This argument seems tenuous, at best. Boling's reconstructed name does not appear anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible nor is there any other evidence for the syncretism he supposes. Soggin's suggestion of a simple confusion in letters is to be preferred.
support his claim to lead Shechem on a deeper primordial genealogy than Abimelek’s claim, indeed, on one that goes as deep as it is possible to go, all the way back to the eponymous ancestor of Shechem, Hamor. In the context of the story of Abimelek and the Deuteronomistic point of view, this scene serves to highlight the inadequacy of such claims and the necessity, in the theological framework of Judges, of adhering to the stipulations of the Yahwistic covenant (Boling 1975:178). However, in the context of our study the scene shows that a claim to rule Shechem was depicted as being dependent, in part, on a genealogical claim and on the primordiality of the relationship of the claimant to the city. Although Gaal is pictured as an outsider who moved into Shechem with a genealogy stated only as far as his father, Ebed, the fact that he questioned the primordiality of Abimelek’s claim to rule by asking if he served Hamor indicates the centrality of this principle in the situation described by the narrative. Rule in Shechem is described as having to depend, at least partially, on a primordial kinship relationship of the ruler to the city. The conflict between Abimelek and Gaal is an example of internal conflict over different primordial claims. One of the arguments presented by the story appears to be that Abimelek failed, in part, because his claim was not as strong as that of others.

The father of Abimelek, Gideon, son of Joash, is described as from the family or clan of Abiezer, one of the sub-groups of the Israelite tribe Manasseh (Judg 6:11; and also 1 Chr 7:18). This primordial link is rehearsed briefly at the beginning of the narrative in Judges 8:32 and, as in the previous cases, establishes Abimelek’s relationship to Shechem.70

70 There has been some suggestion, however, that the details concerning Abimelek’s birth in Judg 8:31 may only be background explanation in light of the fact he is specifically called a son of Jerubbaal in Judg 9:1. The argument is that two different traditions have been united, one having to do with Gideon, son of Abiezer, and the second with Abimelek, son of Jerubbaal. See the comments of Gray (1986:207; 210; 300-301).
The link is through his mother who was a Shechemite. According to Gottwald, the dominant Israelite kin model was one of patrilineal descent with patrilocal (or virilocal) residence (1979:304-305; 315). Thus, it would be expected that the picture portrayed in the story would be that Gideon’s sons and their families would reside with him and that, if he or his family established a pattern of succession, one of the sons from his residence at Ophrah would be the one to succeed him. However, Abimelek does not fit this model.

Indeed, is he portrayed as a true Israelite at all? Not all scholars agree and the text itself is decidedly ambiguous. Soggin (1981:181) describes Abimelek as “half a foreigner” and suggests that as half-Israelite and half-Shechemite he may have been an attractive leader to the population of the city. In other words, by the primordial relationship to his mother he was a Shechemite and represented a link to an independent pre-Israelite past of the city. By the different primordial relationship to his father he was an Israelite. To other Israelites he constituted a legitimate leader. To the Shechemites, Soggin suggests, he represented a link to the new Israelite-dominated political order (1981:182). Both of these arguments, however, are justified on the primordial kin relationship. Gray also describes Abimelek as a “half-Canaanite” and implies that this was a factor in the Deuteronomistic condemnation of his rule (1986:301).

This brings up the question of his mother. The fact that he is described as born from the union of his father with a concubine, *pilegeš*, is neither condemned outright nor implicated as the cause for Abimelek’s demise. De Vaux (1961) suggests that Gideon’s relationship with the mother of Abimelek was comparable to the ancient
Arab ṣadiqa union. In this situation the woman continued to live with her father and with her father’s clan but was visited periodically by her “husband” (see also Hodgson 1974:181). Implied in this kind of relationship is that the woman’s offspring, if they remain with her and within her father’s extended family, will have closer ties to her family than to the father’s family (see Keesing 1975).

This appears to be the situation depicted in Judges 9. Abimelek turns to his mother’s father’s house, bêt ʿābî ʿimmô, for primordially justified support when he makes his claim for leadership over Shechem (Judg 9:1). They back him with the statement that “he is our brother,” ʿāhînû hû, primordial language which depicts the closeness of his relationship to Shechem. The opposite kind of relationship is implied on his father’s side. Indeed, Abimelek is described being so far removed from a socially close relationship to the rest of his family, that he readily nullifies most of the potential opposition to his authority by killing all of his brothers at his father’s house, bêt ʿābîw, in Ophrah (Judg 9:5).

In setting the mother’s father’s house, bêt ʿābî ʿimmô, in opposition to the father’s house, bêt ʿābîw, the narrative not only heightens tension but also describes a situation of great social tension resulting from differing primordial claims. Gideon’s marriage to the woman of Shechem describes a political alliance (Boling 1975; Halpern 1978, 1983b). Through it, Gideon strengthened ties to Shechem and this allegiance, created in the context of particular circumstances, was cemented with marriage and family ties that expressed the alliance in primordial terms.

When Gideon died, however, the alliance did not survive. Abimelek of Shechem, the offspring of the union, manifested his divided loyalties. He reasserted the city’s independence through his mother’s father’s house and removed all other claims to leadership that might have arisen from his father’s house by killing all of his
Yet the reaction from Ophrah is limited to Jotham’s fable. Here, the character of Jotham presents what is essentially a primordial statement, rehearsing Gideon’s actions as a saviour: “my father fought for you, and risked his own life, and rescued you from the hand of Midian,” *'ašer nīlham 'ābî 'ālēkem wayyašlek 'et napšō min-neged wayyaşśēl 'etkem miyyad midyān* (Judg 9:17). But rather than an immediate condemnation of Abimelek and the Shechemites on these primordial grounds, the text depicts Jotham presenting an argument that is decidedly circumstantial. “If you have acted with Jerubbaal and his house in complete faithfulness this day, rejoice in Abimelek,” *wē'īm be'emet ūbētāmīm 'āšītem 'īm yērubba'āl we'im bētō hayyōm ha-zeh 'simēhū ba'ābīmelek* (Judg 9:19). The question of the legitimacy of the heir on the basis of his parentage is not an issue according to the fable. On the one hand, as a descendant of Gideon, Abimelek is pictured as a legitimate contender for the throne. On the other hand, by killing his brothers and removing the claim of Ophrah to remain the seat of power, Abimelek is open to castigation. However, according to the fable, it depends ultimately on the circumstances of Abimelek’s support and whether or not he was chosen faithfully, *be'emet* (Judg 9:19). The text describes the manipulation of these points of primordial legitimacy in the context of arguments over different claims in the internal debate over Israelite leadership and, hence, how Israel was to be governed and set apart from neighbouring people.

In the end, perhaps, the ambiguity of Abimelek’s primordial position helps to explain the conflicts described in Judges 9 which eventually led to his death. He alienated his “father’s house,” *bēt ūabīw*, and removed a potential source of political support by killing his brothers. He also alienated his “mother’s father’s house,” *bēt ūābī 'īmmō*. The text does not supply details in this regard but states that God sent
“an evil spirit,” rûah rā’āh, between Abimelek and the “Lords of Shechem,” ba‘âlê šèkem (Judg 9:23). The Deuteronomistic theological explanation implies that the falling out was in order to avenge the death of Gideon’s other sons (Judg 9:24).

The description of “bad blood” also underlines the shallowness of Abimelek’s primordial claim to rule. The inhabitants of Shechem asserted their freedom from Abimelek and independently ambushed and robbed travelers on the major trade route running through their valley, a practice that seems to describe a toll or tax on the passage of trade goods past the city (Judg 9:25; Soggin 1981:182). This may suggest that the Deuteronomist wanted as well to suggest that Abimelek’s rule had economic implications that were onerous for the Shechemites. In response, Abimelek fought against the people of Shechem and defeated them (Judg 9:40 and 49), only to be killed himself in fighting the inhabitants of Thebez (Judg 9:53). Without backing from either the house of his father or the house of his mother’s father, Abimelek was left without any support other than that of his own followers. Indeed, the narrative underlines the shortcomings of Abimelek’s position even further with the parallel namelessness of his mother and the namelessness of the woman who caused his death.

A final primordial feature in the narrative of Abimelek concerns the issue of kingship and the implication of institutionalized rule. The fact that leadership is a central feature of the story and that this is expressed by words such as mšl, “rule” (Judg 9:2), and mlk, “king” (Judg 9:6), implies a certain stability in the structures of political leadership. What is presupposed in this text is that the leader was not chosen or appointed either by the people or by Yahweh purely in response to a perceived threat as is the case with other “judges.” Rather, elements of a more permanent form of rule are depicted. This implies that there were primordial traditions about leadership and about who was an acceptable leader for the community. Abimelek was
made “king,” melek (Judg 9:6).71 By describing Abimelek as the son of Gideon, the previous ruler, the text implies that the typical dynastic kingship model was the norm, or, at least acceptable. This model seems to presume that the Shechemites’ social and political structures were stable and that they had a tradition of permanent rule. Or, at the very least, this was a primordially defined option used in the debate over leadership.

In fact, however, the text does not depict stability in the leadership or in the way the community supports the ruler. It appears, rather, that, in this case, the Deuteronomist depicted a case where the appointment of a leader depended more on the situation or the circumstances than on a primordially established institution. We turn to these circumstantial features now.

Circumstantial Features

Theological and political circumstances portrayed in the story of Abimelek lead to interactions among the various characters which help to define the identity of those who are involved. As is typical in the stories of the major judges, the Deuteronomistic narrator writes that the primary circumstance motivating the events described in the story of Abimelek is that the Israelites turned away from following Yahweh, the god of Israel, and instead followed the gods of the Canaanites. According to Judges 8:33 they “prostituted themselves to the Baals and made Baal-berit their god,” wayyiznû ʿahārê habbēʿalîm wayyâšimû lâhem baʿal bērît lēʾîhîm. This state-

ment comes at the beginning of the narrative and likely is a part of the typical Deuteronomistic concern for Israelite apostasy (Soggin 1981:161; Boling 1975:169). It is paralleled by a closing statement that Abimelek’s death was just retribution for killing his brothers, the seventy sons of Gideon (or Jerubbaal), and that Shechem’s destruction was in response to their following Abimelek (Judg 9:56-57).

However, despite this Deuteronomistic theological assessment of events in the story, nowhere does Yahweh, the god of Israel, actually figure in the events that are described. The narrative depicts Abimelek’s financial support as coming from the temple of Baal-berit in Shechem (Judg 9:4). In other words, the distinction in religious circumstances that is drawn by the opening and closing sections of the narrative, that is, that the people of Israel are defined by their relationship to the god Yahweh, is not supported by details in the action part of the story. Indeed, religion is not depicted as a factor that defines the conflict between Abimelek and the Shechemites. Abimelek willingly uses the money from the temple of Baal-berit to support his climb to power and, in fact, he is pictured having the same religious alignment as the Shechemites.

The point, then, that allegiance to Yahweh alone is what distinguishes the people of Israel from the members of other groups is not supported by the narrative circumstances in the story of Abimelek. It is only the Deuteronomistic introduction and conclusion that makes this point. Furthermore, the fact that the Deuteronomistic framework applies to and describes the entire situation depicted in the story means that all the characters, both protagonists and antagonists, are united as those who did not, according to the Deuteronomist, follow the stipulations of their relationship with Yahweh. Thus Shechem and its inhabitants are described by this context as Israelite
in spite of their allegiance to a Baalistic sanctuary.\footnote{Halpern suggests, however, that the ethnic distinctions between Israel and Shechem are unclear (1983b:28). Nonetheless, he argues that Judges 9 provides evidence for a treaty between Israel and the non-Israelite inhabitants of Shechem, and that because of additional biblical traditions about Shechem as an important Israelite cult centre, “The evidence of Judges 9 points to a period when Shechem as a town was integral within the Israelite federation” (1983b:92). Furthermore, Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, after raping Dinah, Jacob’s wife Leah’s daughter, proposes that the sons of Jacob, or Israel, exchange wives with the men of the city of Shechem (Gen 34:16). The scheme is never carried out, however, and, according to the story, Dinah’s brothers take the opportunity to kill all the men of Shechem three days after they have been circumcised (Gen 34:25). Although this is a problematic text in terms of dating and it may not accurately reflect any single historic situation, it does indicate that Shechemite women were viewed as potential marriage partners. Gottwald raises the issue of whether or not this is an indication of clan exogamy and of an alliance between Israel and Shechem but concludes that there is no clear evidence for the patrilineal or matrilineal exogamous clan in “ancient Israel” (Gottwald 1979:310-313). Although the practice was not a “rule,” in the narratives of Judges 8 and 9 the exogamous relationship of Gideon with a woman of Shechem did result in a leadership candidate. The Shechemites, therefore, are not completely “other.” Indeed, the offspring of such intermarriage could legitimately be included in Israel’s primordial genealogy. As well, according to Joshua 17:2, Shechem, along with Abiezer, was one of the descendants of Manasseh. This, in Aharoni’s view, is an indication that the Israelites were dominant in the region by this period, had subdued various Canaanite cities, including Shechem, and included them in their genealogical framework (1979:211). Nonetheless he suggests that although power rested in the hands of the Israelites, the general population and government of Shechem “remained Canaanite until the days of Abimelech” (1979:192). In spite of its inclusion in Manasseh genealogy, however, Shechem is described elsewhere as being in the tribal territory of Ephraim (Joshua 20:7; 21:21). The most likely explanation for this discrepancy is that these texts reflect the point of view of writers from a later period in history (see the discussion of Gray 1986:46-51). Nonetheless, Shechem was certainly included in Israel’s genealogical myth and, hence, could be included in a primordial definition of her ethnic identity.}

\footnote{For example, Josh 24 describes a covenant renewal festival on the mountains Gerizim and Ebal, which flanked the valley city. This event, in many histories of Israel, indicates a significant development in the religion of Israel, the unification of a number of tribal groups around the god, Yahweh (e.g., Bright 1981, de Vaux 1978). Other texts support the point. Abram built an altar to Yahweh at Shechem (Gen 12:6-8), Jacob purchased some land there and also built an altar (Gen 33:18-20), and Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal beside the city (Josh 8:30-35). Gray suggests that Shechem was ideally situated to be a boundary sanctuary where “relations between neighbouring groups could be ratified” (1986:16). The neighbours were, in his view, a variety of groups. First, the city was important in relations between the Israelites and the Canaanites (Gen 34). It was significant as well as a boundary sanctuary for the Israelite groups Ephraim and Manasseh, which were important in the early Israelite confederation reflected in Judges 5 (Gray 1986:16). The key for Gray is that, in many texts, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is closely linked with Shechem, the sanctuary of which was associated with El, the Canaanite high god (1986:17). This is specifically so in the Abimelech narrative with ‘El bêîrî (`El berît) (Judg 9:46) and ba`al bêîrî (Judg 8:33; 9:4). As discussed above, Boling suggests that Gaal ben Ebed’s name may reflect what he calls the syncretism of Israelite Yahwism with the Canaanite El or
The dominant situation depicted by the text is in the political sphere and it concerns the question of leadership and succession. The picture is of Abimelek taking advantage of an opening in the configuration of power in the area at the death of his father Gideon, or Jerubbaal. With the help of the “lords of Shechem,” ba‘alē šēkem, he hires mercenaries and kills his brothers, Gideon’s other sons, who also might have had a claim to lead Israel (Judg 9:1-6). While the institution of kingship which the Shechemites follow in making Abimelek their leader may be an indication of primordial traditions about leadership (see Boling 1975:169-170 and above), Abimelek’s actions seem to be focused more on the situation at that particular time. The story describes him taking advantage of that situation.

The motivations for Abimelek’s actions are not stated clearly. Abimelek’s appeal to his family for support before the “lords of Shechem” (Judg 9:1-2) conveys what might best be described as personal ambition. Indeed, the personal focus of Jotham’s fable, the battle between the people Shechem led by Gaal and Abimelek and his forces, the details of Abimelek’s death at Thebez, and the final condemnation of Abimelek by the narrator for killing his brothers, all convey the individuality of Abimelek’s actions. The story apparently depicts a situation of an individual thirsting for power and a debate within the expanding community about the appropriate form of leadership.

Another circumstantial feature in the text centres around the actions of the lords of Shechem. First they support Abimelek, back him with funds from the temple of Baal cult (1975:176). Gray (1986:17) sees this as indicating the assimilation of El, the god of Israel’s ancestors, with El the god of the Canaanites. However, it is more likely that this indicates that Israelite religion developed out of and eventually separated from Canaanite religion (see Cross 1973:39 and especially chapter 3). Indeed, Halpern suggests that the shrine to 'el bērti at Shechem “served as a major cultic center for the earliest Israelite community” (1983b:93).
Baal-berit, and make him king (Judg 9:3-6). But after three years of Abimelek’s rule they apparently renounce his leadership and change their allegiance to Gaal ben Ebed (Judg 9:22-25). The text supplies two situations as explanation for this behaviour. One is theological. Judges 9:23 records that God, ‘êlôhîm, sent an “evil spirit,” rû’ah rû’âh, between Abimelek and the lords of Shechem. This is clarified further in verse 24 with the explanation that this was in retribution for Abimelek killing his brothers. The second hints at an economic circumstance. In Judges 9:25, the text relates that the lords of Shechem set up ambushes on the mountain tops, rôšî hehûrîm, and robbed, wayyizâlû, passers-by. The situation that is pictured implies that the Shechemites, by collecting their own tax, were attempting to establish (or reestablish) their authority in the region in opposition to the authority of Abimelek. Therefore, according to the story, Abimelek went to war against the city in order to reestablish its place in his dominion and to regain economic control. The conflict between Abimelek and Shechem, in the Deuteronomist’s view, is because god intervened and because Shechem wished to be free of Abimelek’s rule. And, within the Deuteronomistic framework, this shows that Abimelek was a wrongfully self-appointed ruler who was not the ideal leader for Israel, including Shechem.

In summary we note that Judges 9 depicts a situation of conflict over the issue of leadership within Israel. Religious circumstances are presumed in the Deuteronomistic introduction and conclusion to the text, but there are no apparent religious differences depicted in the main body of the narrative. Similarly, the people of Shechem and the Israelites led by Abimelek are described participating in the same

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74 Historically this may indicate, as Soggin suggests, that the Shechemites were assessing a tax or toll on trade goods passing through the important cross-roads at the city (1981:182).
political and economic systems. However, the conflict between Abimelek and the lords of Shechem clearly describes differences over the issues of leadership and economics.

Conclusion

Judges 8:30 - 9:57 pictures a series of situations surrounding the character of Abimelek and, in terms of ethnicity, centering on the issues of leadership and alliance. The problems of leadership illustrated by the Deuteronomistic historian depict internal debates about right and appropriate social ties and about the group's correct political form. There is no clear indication that the people of Shechem were "enemies" in an *a priori* primordial sense, like the Canaanites, Amalekites, or Philistines. What is depicted here, rather, are internal flexible and adaptive processes of ethnicity in a situation where primordial facets of identity are manipulated in the context of particular circumstances in order to gain political power.

Without a clearly depicted situation of conflict with another primordially defined group in this situation, however, the ethnic identity of Abimelek's group is not established with complete clarity. Shechem is depicted as being amenable to Abimelek's rule on the one hand and yet rejecting his rule and suffering destruction on the other. The city is pictured as not being unequivocally Israelite and as maintaining non-Israelite traditions, especially religious ties through the temple of Baalberit. Abimelek is depicted ambiguously as well. He is son of the great judge and victorious Israelite leader Gideon on the one hand and an anonymous Shechemite woman. He is described as being motivated by what seems to be personal ambition but, at least initially, he is described as being supported by the city. The most promi-
nent reason for Abimelek’s failure, according to the story, is theological. He tried to usurp the correct order of rule by installing himself as ruler without being appointed as Yahweh’s representative. Yet the details of Abimelek’s lineage and the political implications of his situation suggests that perhaps he was condemned because his claim to rule was based in part on his mother’s Shechemite family and this was considered unacceptable. Abimelek’s lineage is implied to be a factor in his failure. He was not a “pure” Israelite who followed the Israelite religious ideal of rule by Yahweh’s appointment only. Ethnically, he is described, in part, as an “outsider” and that seems to be intended to explain, in part, why he failed.

Furthermore there are the economic factors. As in the stories of Deborah and Gideon, the control of trade appears to be a key issue. Here, the text describes Abimelek apparently attempting to control trade along the lucrative routes leading through Shechem. These would have provided alternative passages to the route through the Jezreel valley, which was also controlled by Israel, as depicted in the narratives of Deborah and Gideon. The group identified as Israel in the Deuteronomistic introduction is also treated ambiguously. Its members are united in history and common worship of the one god Yahweh on the one hand and yet bickering and fighting among themselves on the other hand and unable to settle on Abimelek’s rule. Similarly, the Shechemites are not treated with particular clarity. Although they accept Abimelek’s rule for a time, they are described as having not relinquished their non-Israelite religious traditions and their particular economic interests. They too remain “outsiders” in one sense and that too suggests, in part, why the city was destroyed.

Once again, we see ethnic distinctions being drawn, although in this case without much strength or clarity, by reference to primordial traditions as well as to
particular circumstances and interests. The most significant point is that the text also pictures internal conflict over the nature of the Israelite polity and, hence, the ethnic character of the face it would present to neighbouring people. The result of this particular debate was a lack of consensus except that, according to the Deuteronomistic introduction and conclusion, all characters in the story failed to act in an appropriately Israelite manner. Abimelek, the ruler who represents the whole group, holds the position only temporarily and his abortive reign ends in tragedy.
JEPHTHAH

JUDGES 10:17 - 12:7
Jephthah

Judges 10:17 - 12:7

Introduction

The narrative of Jephthah the Gileadite, Judg 10:17-12:7, describes the conflict between the people of Ammon and an Israelite sub-group, the people of Gilead. The hero is Jephthah, an illegitimate son of Gilead, who, according to the narrative, returns from imposed exile in the land of Tob to lead Israel to victory against the Ammonites with the help of Yahweh. It is a bittersweet victory, however, for Jephthah’s triumph comes at the expense of his nameless daughter, whom he sacrifices according to the terms of a vow he made to the god of Israel before his battle with the Ammonites. The conquest is also marred by a scene of intertribal conflict between the Israelite groups, Gilead and Ephraim.

Commentators have generally focused on the theological implications of the narrative, on the pattern of Jephthah’s judgeship as compared to that of the other judges, and on what this text adds to our understanding of the history of relations between the Cisjordanian Israelites and their neighbours (see, for example, Moore 1910; Burney 1920; Gray 1967; Boling 1975; Soggin 1981; Gray 1986). Others have focused specifically on the shorter narrative segments within the story of Jephthah, on the tragedy of Jephthah’s daughter (Sypherd 1948; Day 1989), or on the infamous Shibboleth incident (Rendsburg 1992).

Our focus is on the portrayal of interactions between groups and individuals. It is in the description of these activities and the descriptions of similarities and differences among the actors that we find evidence for our discussion of ethnicity. As in
previous sections we will focus first on distinctions and structures that are portrayed in primordial terms and second on those that are described in terms of specific circumstances.

Primordial Features

The Ammonites, bêné 'ammôn, are the first group mentioned in this story (Judg 10:17).\(^75\) The key factor is that the Ammonites, bêné 'ammôn (Judg 10:17), are assumed in the narrative of Jephthah to be different and distinct from the Israelites, bêné yišrâ'êl (Judg 10:17). No explanation is given; it is presented as an a priori fact. The basis for the distinction is not dependent on the particular circumstances but, rather, is based on the Deuteronomist's assumption of difference expressed in primordial terms with the language of kinship. The "sons," bêné, of one ancestor, 'ammôn, are separate from the "sons," bêné, of another ancestor, yišrâ'êl. This implies that antecedent kin relations are the reason for the difference between the two groups. The reasons for the particular conflict between the two groups that this narrative describes will be explored in more detail below.

Names of smaller groups also figure prominently. Manasseh is mentioned (Judg 11:29) as an area through which Jephthah passed on his way to battle with the Ammonites. It also appears in an obscure explanatory passage in the Shibboleth inci-

\(^75\) Biblical tradition describes a root for the distinction between the Ammonites and Israelites in Gen 19:36-38. Ammon, the eponymous ancestor of the Ammonites, was the son of Abraham's nephew Lot, the result of an incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters, according to the story. There is no other biblical information on the origins of the Ammonites or how they came to occupy the plateau around the headwaters of the Zarqa river, the biblical Jabboq. According to the traditions of Israel's entry into the land, the Ammonites were never conquered and, indeed, Deut 2:19 and 37 depicts Yahweh explicitly ordering the Israelites to avoid Ammonite territory.
dent (Judg 12:4, which will be examined in greater detail below). These references to Manasseh, without any further explanation in the story, depict an understanding of the territory occupied by the Israelite group Manasseh and its relationship to Gilead in terms that can best be described as primordial since it presupposes a separation and distinction presumably based on prior circumstances although, in this case, without any explanation or description of the situation that created the difference. The primordiality of this difference would be stronger in this story if details regarding the prior root of difference were supplied.

The group Ephraim also figures prominently in the narrative of Jephthah, specifically in the story depicting the inter-Israelite conflict between the men of Ephraim and the men of Gilead. Although the conflict, which emphasizes differences in the identity of the groups involved, is over particular circumstances that are not explicitly detailed in the text, the distinctions in name indicate a division between Israelite subgroups which is assumed by the Deuteronomist and, hence, carries an implication of difference based on an antecedent situation or condition.

76 This second case, however, is in a phrase that does not appear in some Greek manuscripts (Boling 1975:212; Gray 1986:321).

77 The territory of Manasseh extended from the mountains south of the Jezreel Valley into the highlands on the east side of the Jordan River. It was bounded on the north by the Yarmuk River, on the south by the Jabbok River, and on the east by the territory controlled by the Ammonites (de Geus 1992). According to the genealogy of Numbers 26, Gilead was a sub-group or clan, mišpāḥāh, of Machir which was a sub-group or clan of Manasseh.

78 Ephraim and Manasseh both are described as sons of Joseph (Num 26; Gen 48:13-20). Manasseh, the first born, is listed first in the genealogy of Numbers 26. However, Ephraim is described as having priority over Manasseh according to the blessing of the eponymous ancestor, Israel (Gen 48:13-20). This apparent contradiction expresses a kind of tension between the two groups in the primordial terms of genealogy. The reasons for this tension are not explicitly stated in the text although, as de Geus (1976: 79-80) points out, it may reflect a historical situation where Ephraim held expansionist political aims and was moving into territory held by Manasseh. Both groups occupied the central hill country north of Jerusalem, Manasseh southward from the Jezreel valley to Tappuah and Ephraim southward from Tappuah through the mountains north of Jerusalem (Aharoni 1979:210, 257; Josh 16:5-9; 17:7-9). The uneasy relationship of these two neighbours may be reflected in the situation of the town of
The Gileadites, in Noth’s view, were called “fugitives of Ephraim,” pēlitē ṭeprayim, in Judges 12:4 because, in historical terms, Ephraim became the dominant group that eventually expanded eastward across the Jordan into the region of Gilead, an area associated with the tribe of Manasseh (Josh 17:1; Noth 1960:61; see also Gottwald 1979:255). Boling (1975:211), on the other hand, suggests that the phrase, pēlitē ṭeprayim, applies not to the Gileadites, as it does in the following verse, Judges 12:5, but to the Ephraimites who had crossed the Jordan to fight the Gileadites. In either case, however, this labelling replicates a distinction between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites and expresses it in primordial terms. The men of Ephraim, ṭis ṭeprayim, are described as willing to participate together with Gilead in the battle against the Ammonites (Judg 12:1-2) and are depicted acting as if they, because of this participation, were entitled to a share of the benefits of Jephthah’s victory. They complain to Jephthah that they were not included in the fight against the Ammonites and threaten to burn down his house (Judg 12:1). This description is the situation that leads to the conflict. As when dealing with the Ammonite threat, Jephthah is pictured trying diplomacy first, but then turning to battle as negotiation fails.79

The result is the infamous shibboleth incident (Judg 12:5-6). The primordial distinction between the two groups implicitly justifies Ephraim’s apparent claim on the territory and economic advantages gained by Gilead through the victory of Jephthah.80 The brief passage reports that, during the conflict between the two Israelite groups, the Gileadites under Jephthah were victorious over the Ephraimites

79 On the parallel structure of the two conflicts, Gilead versus the Ammonites and Gilead versus the Ephraimites, see Boling (1975:212-213).

80 This is a distinction which is expressed in, for example, Num 26 and Gen 48:13-20.
and they captured the "fords of the Jordan," *maḇērōt hayyarden* (Judg 12:5). The fleeing men of Ephraim, trying to return home by crossing the river from east to west, were stopped by the Gileadites and asked if they were Ephraimites. When they answered, "no," the Gileadites forced each to say, "Shibboleth," šībbōlet. The Ephraimites could not and instead said, "Sibboleth," sībbōlet (Judg 12:6). This inability to produce the same sound as the Gileadites gave away the true identity of the retreating Ephraimites and the men of Gilead killed them. A key point for us, however, is that this linguistic distinction is described primordially. That is, the story describes the difference as an *a priori* fact that the Ephraimites could not pronounce the word in the same way as the Gileadites and this fact is presented as an established marker of difference between the two groups. The situation itself is not depicted as the cause of the dialectical difference between Ephraim and Gilead. The fact of difference, according to the way it is portrayed in this story, is primordial.

Nonetheless, although the difference is depicted as a primordial distinction, the relevance of this dialectical distinction depends on this particular situation. The conflict between Ephraim and Gilead is primarily about the territory and economic advantages gained by Gilead through the victory of Jephthah over the Ammonites.

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81 At face value, this incident suggests that, at least in some cases, Ephraimites could not pronounce š as š but instead pronounced š as s. However, the linguistic solution to the problem rests in the Proto-Semitic interdental phoneme /ʃ/ or θ (as in thin). Rendsburg, following Speiser, argues that this phoneme was preserved in Transjordanian dialects (pointing out that it appears in Ammonite and in later Safaitic inscriptions) (Rendsburg 1988, 1992). However, this phoneme, /ʃ/, was represented in Hebrew and other Canaanite dialects by the grapheme š. So instead of saying [šibbōlet], written šībbōlet, as the Transjordanian Gileadites could (although they would have sounded as if they had a lisp), the Cisjordanian Ephraimites said [sibbōlet], written sībbōlet. Thus the distinction is not due to different pronunciations of š, but is due to different pronunciations of /ʃ/ which could only be written as š. The Gileadites could produce /ʃ/ while the Ephraimites could not. Their /ʃ/ came out sounding like /s/. See also Halpern (1983b:166-167). Regardless of how the different pronunciation is explained linguistically, as Rendsburg points out (1992:1211), this is an important piece of evidence, if it is historically accurate, that there were regional dialects of Hebrew.
this particular situation. That is, these are the circumstances that provide the reason for the conflict depicted in the story. Disagreement over who has rights to spoil won by another group is the situation. The difference between the two groups, indicated in this story by who could not pronounce šibbōlet, is described primordially. But it is the particular situation that exacerbates their primordially defined differences to the point of conflict. It is the situation that leads to the linguistic boundary marker becoming a salient marker of ethnic difference.

That this marker is described as an indicator of difference between two Israelite sub-groups is significant in terms of ethnicity. Linguistic differences are often taken to be markers of ethnic distinctions since they function as key factors in the process of ethnic boundary definition and maintenance (see, for example, Fishman 1968, 1989, Gudykunst and Schmidt 1987, Huffines 1986). As portrayed here, the difference in pronunciation of šibbōlet and sibbōlet qualifies as a primordial difference in dialect and, given that this marker is significant in the particular context of this conflict, the story represents a description of ethnic difference in the context of particular circumstances. Note that the description of ethnicity involves two aspects, primordial and circumstantial, as we expect from the theoretical model presented earlier. The shibboleth incident, as depicted in Judg 12:5-6, thus can be interpreted with additional details by our model of ethnicity.82

Place names in the narrative also represent a primordially defined understanding of territory and of distinctions between regions occupied by different groups. Gilead, gil'âd (Judg 10:17-18) is used in three different ways: as the name of the eponymous

82 If an historical implication about the premonarchic period is to be drawn from this analysis, it is that the portrayal of ethnic separation in these verses supports the view that, prior to the monarchy, Israel had not yet achieved complete ethnic unity (a view expressed by Mendenhall 1962:85).
ancestor of the group, as the people of the group itself, and as the territory in which the people lived. It signifies the region primarily (De Geus 1976). Ammonite territory lay immediately southeast and Moabite land stretched directly to the south. In some cases the name appears to have been applied to all Israelite territory in Transjordan (Aharoni 1979:39; Num 32:29, 30). As we have already seen, Judges 5:17 depicts an Israelite presence in this area and chastises Gilead for being one of the Transjordanian groups that did not participate in the battle of Deborah against Sisera.

According to Judg 11:26, Israelites had lived in the area for 300 years. However, the statement in Judg 11:1 that Gilead was Jephthah’s father, wayyôled gil’ad ’et yiptâh, serves to underline the point by emphasizing Jephthah’s primordial roots. He was a Gileadite by birth. However, notwithstanding the fact he was the “son of another woman,” ben ’iššâh ’aherent (Judg 11:2) and the fact that his apparently younger brothers excluded him from his inheritance rights, “you will not inherit in our father’s house,” lô-tînḥal bēbît-’āбинû (Judge 11:2), and forced him

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83 This territory lay east of the Jordan River and extended up and over the highlands on the north and south of the Jabbok River as far as the inhabitable desert fringe on its eastern boundary. It included the high fertile mountainous region called Bashan (Ottosson 1992). The area’s link to central Israelite territory is rooted deeply in Israelite primordial history. Gilead was the region occupied by Jacob, the eponymous ancestor of all Israel, when he formalized his relationship to Laban the Aramean by covenant (Gen 31:23 ff.) and even before he received the name Israel (Gen 32:28). This narrative is one of many texts which legitimate Israel’s claim to the territory of Gilead on the east side of the Jordan river (Ottosson 1992).

84 The individual named as Jephthah’s father could not be the patriarchal figure, Gilead, the son of Machir who was the son of Manasseh (Num 26:29, 27:1, 36:1), who would have lived generations earlier according to the biblical chronology. Machir was probably a Cisjordanian group originally (Judg 5:14) that may have moved east across the Jordan into the general region of Gilead (see Halpern 1983b:169). Machir appears therefore in the primordial genealogy as the eponymous ancestor, the “father of Gilead” (Num 26:29; Josh 17:1; de Geus 1976:72, 1992). This is not surprising and, indeed, as Gottwald points out, the “tribe,” šêbet, was a malleable social unit which changed demographically and geographically over time (1979:256).

85 As Boling points out, this statement explains the earlier statement that Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. He follows Burney in suggesting that “Gilead” refers to the territory, here personified as the “father” of Jephthah (Boling 1975:197).
into exile in the land of Tob (Judg 11:3), Jephthah is still depicted as a legitimate leader of Gilead against the Ammonite threat. The text justifies his right to rule through his genealogy. Indeed, Gray suggests that Jephthah’s title, “the Gileadite,” haggil’ādi, is, in this case, an “ethnic” appellation rather than a “geographical” designation (Gray 1986:314).

The main point is this: Gilead refers to a particular area and to the people of that area and is used in a way that demonstrates how Gilead is understood primordially. And, as Gottwald points out, in terms of ethnicity, Gilead is described in the Jephthah narrative as a sociopolitical entity (1979:247, 255).

A number of other place names in the text can be treated as primordial features. Of note is the “land of Tob,” ‘erēš tōb, the land to which Jephthah fled after his brothers drove him away from his father’s house. The point for us, in this case, is that the narrator of the story assumes that the significance of the “land of Tob” is obvious to the reader and its place in the landscape is known without additional explanation in terms of circumstances. The Deuteronomistic historian may be implying that prior conditions establish the significance of the “land of Tob” for Jephthah’s identity. However, without additional details of the antecedent situation, this primordial point of difference is not established strongly.

The case is similar for the place Mizpah, mispāh (Judg 10:17, 11:11, 34), or Mizpeh of Gilead, mispēh gil’ād (Judg 11:29), and the places Aror, ’ārō’ēr, Min-

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86 Gray suggests this may have been an area on the eastern edge of the Bashan plateau that was occupied by Arameans (Gray 1986:315). Noth puts it in roughly the same area, further south but still north of the Jabbok River (Noth 1960:158). Boling feels it refers to an area on the Bashan plateau (Syria) that was later allied with the Ammonites against David (2 Sam 10:6). He points out that the literal meaning of tōb, “good,” also has a technical nuance of “covenantal amity” and suggests that this place name was applied in this particular narrative context more because of Jephthah’s covenanted relationship with Yahweh than because of any historical veracity (1975:197).
nith, minnîr, Abel-keramim, 'ābēl kērāmīm (Judg 11:33), and Zaphon, sāpōn (Judg 12:1). The exact locations of none of these places have been established (Boling 1975:208). However, as with the "land of Tob," they all are a priori part of the author’s narrative geography and, hence, static descriptive features in this story. Mizpah gains additional primordial significance because it is at this place that Jephthah sealed his covenant with the elders of Gilead before the god Yahweh as a witness (Judg 11:11). However, as with the "land of Tob," these place names are only weak indicators of primordial distinctions, as the Deuteronomistic historian does not provide additional details.

The strongest primordial statement in this narrative is Jephthah’s retelling of a portion of Israel’s ancient history during his negotiation with the Ammonite king (Judg 11:12-28). In response to Jephthah’s query about the reason for the Ammonite threat against his land, the Ammonite king sends a message to the effect that, in the past, during Israel’s flight from Egypt, Ammonite land between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers was taken by Israel (Judg 11:13). Jephthah’s message in response summarizes Israel’s primordial history in Transjordan following the flight from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. His claim has three aspects. The first is that Israel, under the banner of their god Yahweh, had won the land fairly from Sihon, king of the Amorites, who held the territory at that time. The argument is that the Israelite victory in that earlier primordial time established the right for Israel to hold the land

87 Boling, however, does suggest that Mizpah may be in the area of Jebel Jēl’ad and Khirbet Jēl’ad to the south of the Jabbok River (1975:199).

88 It may be that Mizpah had particular importance because it had a central religious shrine that was relevant for the group as a whole and not just for the people of the town itself (Aharoni 1979:265).

89 These verses replicate Num 21:21-24 and Deut 2:26-35 with only minor variations. They may represent, as Gray suggests, a “free adaptation by the Deuteronomistic Historian” (1986:316). Note also the similar statement in Judg 6:8-10, discussed earlier.
in the present (Judg 11:21). The second aspect of the claim is that Yahweh the god of Israel was victorious over Chemosh the god of the Moabites and therefore the Israelites had a right to the territory gained by their victorious deity (Judg 11:24). Jephthah’s third point is that since Israel had held the land for some 300 years, according to him, then the Ammonites had no right to challenge for it after all that time (Judg 11:26). All of these statements express in primordial terms through an appeal to the past the claim that Israel had to the land.

The problem that has vexed historians concerns the references to Moab and the Moabite deity Chemosh (Judg 11:24-25). Supposedly Jephthah is negotiating only with the Ammonites but these references seem to imply that the Moabites are involved as well. Some have suggested that, in fact, the negotiations are wholly between Jephthah and the Moabites (Moore 1910). Others have argued that two accounts have been conflated, one describing exchanges with the Moabites and another detailing interaction with the Ammonites (Burney 1920). Boling feels there has been no conflation and argues instead that the Ammonite king is following diplomatic protocol by negotiating in the name of the Moabites and the Moabite deity who held the territory before both the Ammonites and the Israelites (1975:203-204; see also Soggin 1981:210). Gray suggests a similar view but puts the use of the earlier Moabite tradition in the hands of the Deuteronomistic Historian (1986:316). This is the view we follow here given that our discussion focusses on the major judge stories as Deuteronomistic creations. In any case, the appeal to a Moabite tradition in the context of Israel’s history represents to our analysis an appeal to a primordial basis for the distinction between the Israelites and their neighbours. The past is described as a justification for the present distinction.
Religion is another feature that is expressed in primordial terms in the narrative of Jephthah. As in the other stories we have examined, Yahweh is taken a priori to be the god of Israel. Yahweh is presented as witness to the covenant agreement between Jephthah and the elders of Gilead when they ask him to return from exile to be their leader in the fight against the Ammonites (Judg 11:10-11). According to Jephthah’s telling of the primordial history of Israel’s presence in the contested area, Yahweh was the victorious warrior god who won the land for the Israelites instead of Chemosh, the god of the Moabites (Judg 11:24). As well, it is to Yahweh that Jephthah makes the vow that results in his victory over the Ammonites and the unfortunate sacrifice of his daughter (Judg 11:30-31). And finally, it is Yahweh who empowers Jephthah with his “spirit,” rūāh yhwh (Judg 11:29) and, according to the theology of the text, gives Jephthah victory over the Ammonites in these circumstances (Judg 11:32). The role and actions of Israel’s deity in support of Israel are presented in these texts as facts independent of the particular circumstances surrounding the human interaction. That is, Yahweh’s role is not defined by the particular circumstances depicted in this narrative but, rather, the presentation of Yahweh as a witness, a victorious warrior god, and a supplier of personal power to Jephthah are actions that are assumed to be appropriate for Israel’s god. They are makers of the difference between the god of the Israelites and the god of the Ammonites (or Moabites) and hence, by extension, markers of the difference between Ammonites (or Moabites) and Israelites.

The fact that the enemy’s deity is mentioned by name is also significant in primordial terms. Although the particular deity of the Ammonites was Milkom, milkōm (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:5; see Heider 1985), and not Chemosh, kēmōš, the national deity of the Moabites as stated here (Judg 11:24), the point is clearly primordial. No
additional history or explanation is given for Chemosh. It is used by the writer as an already established fact that requires no additional explanation. The implication is that Israelites and the enemy (Moabite or Ammonite) are distinct people who have different deities.

To sum up, primordially defined differences are depicted in a number of the features which distinguish the various groups named in the Jephthah story. Jephthah, the Israelite hero, is defined by his genealogy as a Gileadite and, therefore, as a valid leader, although not without negotiation, as we will see below. Jephthah’s leadership of the Gileadites is distinguished from that of the Ammonites who are described as being led by a king. The primordial differences between the sons of Ammon and the sons of Israel also include territory, religion, and history. The shibboleth incident describes in primordial terms a linguistic difference between groups living in different regions. Even though difference is depicted as becoming relevant only in the particular situation, the exact circumstances are not described in the text and so the distinction between Gilead and Ephraim is related only in primordial terms.

Circumstantial Features

The circumstantial features in the narrative of Jephthah the Gileadite are not as prominent or as frequent as the primordial features. Nonetheless it is clear that the particular situations depicted in this story do play a role in creating the distinctions between Israeliite and non-Israelite that the text portrays. The political situation is the clearest circumstantial feature, affecting not only the interaction between the Israelites and the Ammonites but also Jephthah’s role as leader of the Israel. Economic circumstances, although only implied, may also be relevant in explaining the interactions
among the various groups described in the text.

It should be noted initially that, despite Jephthah’s banishment from Gilead due to the primordial facts of his birth, he is pictured being able to gain some success and a reputation as a “mighty warrior,” *gibbôr hayil* (Judg 11:1), with his own band of followers, mercenary outlaws, or “worthless fellows,” *ʿānāšîm rēqîm* (Judg 11:4). In other words, the text portrays Jephthah’s power as stemming more from the particular circumstances of his situation than from any *a priori* structured place in the hierarchy of leadership within Gilead. Indeed, Jephthah’s appointment in this situation represents the antithesis of an established order. He is portrayed as the son of another woman who was denied any part of his inheritance or place in the established order of succession (Judg 11:2) and yet he is the one who leads Israel to victory over the Ammonites. The text implies that it was because of Jephthah’s reputation in the land of Tob that, when the Ammonite threat arose, the Gileadite elders turned to Jephthah for leadership.

The political circumstances surrounding his appointment can also be found in the negotiations between Jephthah and the elders of Gilead. They ask him to be their “commander,” *qāṣîn* (Judg 11:6, 11) and “head,” *rōʾî* (Judg 11:8, 11) so that they can fight with the Ammonites (Judg 11:6). His appointment is portrayed as

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90 Abimelech’s personal followers are described in the same terms (Judg 9:4).

91 As Gray points out, this term is usually related to the Arabic *qāḏî*, “judge” or “decider,” and hence to give Jephthah’s role in this story the same connotation given in the usual Deuteronomistic summation of each hero’s life, that is, that they “judged,” *tāpat*, Israel for so many years (e.g., Judg 12:7, “Jephthah judged Israel six years,” *wayyišpōt yiṯpāh ʿet yiḵrāʾel šēš šānîm*). However, Gray suggests that, in fact, *qāṣîn* may not be related to *qāḏî* but may be a passive participle of a verbal root *qāṣan*, with the sense of “rule” or “command” (1986:109). It is used in the sense of military commander, for example, in Josh 10:24.

92 Boling suggests that *rōʾî* is a hierarchically higher and more permanent office than *qāṣîn* and reflects the additional enticement of greater political power that the elders of Gilead were offering Jephthah (1975:198).
being dependent on the particular situation. This point is emphasized when Jephthah questions why he should be appointed when he is the one who has been rejected and driven into exile (Judg 11:7). The dearth of primordial structure in Jephthah's position as leader and representative of the Gileadites is underlined by the conditionality of his agreement with the elders. He is depicted saying he will be "head," rōš, "if," 'im, he returns and the Lord gives him victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:9). This conditional bargain with the Gileadite elders is sealed by the primordial god, Yahweh, as a witness at the primordial sanctuary site of Mizpah (Judg 11:11). But the agreement which makes him a leader of the Israelites is set entirely in the context of the particular circumstances of the Ammonite threat and not in any primordial structures of Gileadite or Israelite group organization. In fact, this point is highlighted further by the fact that the Ammonites are ruled by a king, melek, in contrast to the Israelites who do not have a permanent ruler. This political situation is one of the features which distinguishes the two groups.

A further point to note is that the depiction of this political difference between Israel and Ammon is mirrored in the types of argument presented in the story itself. Within Israel the issue of leadership is decided in response to the particular situation at a specific time. It is a conditional agreement between Jephthah and the elders of Gilead. Within the Israelite boundary we see a flexibility that is responsive to the particular circumstances. On the Ammonite side of the boundary between the two groups, however, the picture is quite different. Jephthah is described couching his argument to the Ammonite king in distinctly primordial terms. The defining Israelite face that Jephthah presents to the Ammonites is solidly constructed on the facts of primordial history. Yet within the Israelite camp leadership, at least in this case, is described in much more malleable terms.
The situation behind the Ammonite threat and the war between the two groups is obscure. No circumstances are presented to explain why there is this particular tension. The story of Jephthah merely begins with the statements that the Ammonites were “called to arms,” yîssā‘ágū, against the Gileadites (Judg 10:17), and that the Ammonites “made war,” yîllâhâmû, against Israel (Judg 11:4). As we have seen above, Jephthah’s negotiations with the Ammonites are based exclusively on a primordial argument and nothing is described of the specific interests of the two groups. Jephthah’s argument is depicted as having no effect (Judg 11:28), and the battle ensues (Judg 11:32). Since there are no specific circumstances described as the cause for the confrontation, the story of Jephthah carries the implication that it is based solely on primordial differences, that is, on the past battles, victories, and differences in territory won by Yahweh on behalf of the people of Israel (Judg 11:12-28).

However, the wider context for the Jephthah story described in Judg 10:6-16, before the narrative proper begins, does depict circumstances in typical Deuteronomistic terms which do imply a reason for the tension between Israel and Ammon. According to this introduction, the Israelites again reneged on their loyalty to Yahweh by worshipping other gods, specifically the gods of other people and places, the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia (Judg 10:6). Because of this situation the Israelites were oppressed by the Ammonites and the Philistines (Judg 10:7-9). Israel cries out to Yahweh (Judg 10:10) who rehearses primordial acts of salvation and then abandons them to the salvation of their most recent gods (Judg 10:11-14), whereupon they have a change of heart and return to Yahweh (Judg 10:15-16). Thus, as portrayed in the Deuteronomistic introduction, the circumstances behind the conflict between Ammon and Israel is Israel’s lack of faithfulness to Yah-
This theological situation leads to the strife between the two groups.

However, in the Jephthah story proper, the fact that territory figures in Jephthah's primordial argument about the past suggests that territory may be significant in the description of the current situation of conflict. This is emphasized further by the story's summary of Jephthah’s victory. It records that he inflicted a great defeat on the Ammonites, *makkāh gēdōlāh mēʾād* (Judg 11:33), on over 20 towns in a territory extending from Aroer to Minnith and Abel-keramim (Judg 11:33). While not stated explicitly in this story, the implied situation is that the Ammonites were interested in maintaining their strategic location on the main trade route that ran south from Syria through what today is Jordan along the eastern side of the highland plateau to the Arabian peninsula (Malamat 1971:156-157). The description of Jephthah's successes in the land of Tob, if that region did, in fact, lie further to the north in the Bashan region, may also be an implicit reference to the circumstances of trade between Syria and the territory of the Ammonites (Judg 11:3). As well, recall that in another narrative, Gideon is portrayed pursuing Midianite caravaneers from the Jezreel valley up through the Transjordanian highlands and into the eastern desert and the area of the major north-south trade route on the plateau (Judg 7:22-25; 8:10-11). Together these pieces of evidence suggest a picture of economic circumstances associated with trade in the Transjordanian plateau that describes a situation that may have

93 Soggin suggests the number may be a later editorial addition with minimal historical value that was intended to magnify the victory (1981:214). Malamat, however, argues the 20 refers to specific Ammonite border fortresses (1971:157). Although the exact location of these places is not known, it is likely that they lay in the region west and possibly south-west of Rabbath-ammon, the capital of the Ammonites (Aharoni 1979:265).

94 Bright (1981:181) suggests an historical situation in which the specific Ammonite interest in this conflict with the Gileadites derived from an aim to control a greater portion of the Arabian caravan trade at the expense of the Israelites.
motivated, at least in part, tension and conflict between the Ammonites and the Israelites under Jephthah. And this situation, although only implied by the text, describes a circumstance in which the boundary distinguishing the Israelites from the Ammonites became salient.

A final circumstantial issue to consider is depicted in the narrative segment concerning Jephthah’s daughter. Before his battle with the Ammonites, Jephthah makes a vow, neder, to Yahweh that he will sacrifice to him whatever first comes out of the doors of his house on his return from victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:30-31).

The tragedy portrayed with such poignancy is that it is Jephthah’s innocent daughter who comes dancing out to meet her victorious warrior father and who must be offered as a sacrifice according to the terms of her father’s vow (Judg 11:34-40).95

Two circumstantial points can be noted in this story. First, Jephthah’s daughter is the one who makes the claim that it was Yahweh who gave Jephthah the victory over the Ammonites in this situation. Unlike other narratives in the book of Judges, that define the Israelite’s apostasy as the situation behind the conflict between Israel and other groups, in the story of Jephthah the confrontation between Israel and Ammon is explained more in primordial terms. Nonetheless, Israel’s victory under Jephthah’s leadership is described by Jephthah’s daughter as being due to the actions of Yahweh in giving him vengeance over his Ammonite enemies in this particular situation, ‘āšāh lēkā yhwh nēqāmōt mēʾēyēbēkā mibbēnē ʿammōn (Judg 11:36).

Although the roots of the conflict are described primordially, the resolution is explained as being due to the particular circumstances of Yahweh’s actions.

95 See Bal (1988a; 1988b) for a literary and feminist analysis of this and other narratives in Judges.
The second point concerns the depiction of Jephthah’s daughter’s actions when she learns of her impending sacrifice. She requests that her father allow her to go into the mountains with her companions to “bewail my virginity,” ‘ebkeh ‘al-bētūlay, for two months (Judg 11:37). Day has shown convincingly that this story describes a rite of passage for women passing from immaturity to adolescence (1989). This story is, in a sense, an etiological tale which was told to explain a particular ritual practice (Boling 1975:210; Day 1989:58-59). There is, unfortunately, no other reference to this particular practice in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently we cannot say with certainty whether or not this ritual became a uniquely Israelite ceremony and a feature of its ritual life that distinguished its women from those of neighbouring peoples. Nonetheless, this picture of the circumstances surrounding this “first” practice of the custom stands as an explanation for its origin. Indeed, the text implies that it is because of the particular situation of Jephthah’s daughter that the “daughters of Israel” still practice this “custom,” hōq (Judg 11:39), as if at the author’s time the ritual was viewed as a primordial rite. Still, this could only be taken as relevant for ethnicity if we could show that such a ritual was a marker of difference between the Israelites and their neighbours.

In summary, we note that the dominant circumstantial features described in the narrative of Jephthah involve the political situation and secondarily the economic and religious situation. The political circumstances are seen most clearly in the negotiations surrounding Jephthah’s appointment as leader of Gilead. As depicted in this story, Israel’s leadership was appointed according to the demands of the situation at the particular time. In contrast, Ammon’s leadership was characterized by the more permanent structures of kingship. The economic situation is not specified directly but is implied in the location of Ammon along the major north-south trade route in the
highlands of Jordan. Finally, the religious situation depicted in the tragic circumstances surrounding Jephthah's daughter gives another image of Israel's distinctiveness being defined in the context of a particular situation.

Conclusion

In the narrative of Jephthah the Gileadite, primordial aspects of distinction are more prevalent than are differentiating features described in terms of particular circumstances. As in the other stories we have examined, it is clear that the distinctions and conflicts between Israel and her neighbours were portrayed using both primordial and circumstantial features.

Although Jephthah was made a leader in answer to a particular situation of conflict, his qualifications and justification for the position are largely primordial. He is entitled to be judge in Israel because of who he is in an a priori sense. The facts of his birth, as they are portrayed here, are enough justification.

The distinction between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon, although depicted as a single case of conflict in a particular situation, is also based on an understanding of difference that is taken for granted. This narrative describes the two groups as inherently distinct. Furthermore, the difference is depicted in the words of Jephthah as being based on events that occurred in the past, that is, on primordial history. The territories that the two groups inhabit are implied by the Deuteronomistic Historian to be intelligible as distinct areas and no explanation of the particular circumstances are required in order to describe the difference between Israel and Ammon. And, finally, the deities of the two people are assumed to be distinct, but without any further explanation.
However, the conflict between the Israelites and the Ammonites is described in this story in the context of a particular incident. Jephthah’s appointment is in response to this situation. The methods of leadership of the two groups are different and Israel’s leader, Jephthah, acquires the role only in this context. Furthermore, although the two groups are described as being primordially different, there is the implication in the story that there are particular economic circumstances that were among the factors that led to the conflict.

It appears that, as in the other stories in Judges, the differences between the two main groups are depicted both in primordial terms and on factors that are unique to the particular situation. The fluid and changeable nature of the distinctions between groups is seen most clearly in the shibboleth incident. A primordial dialectical distinction between Ephraim and Gilead is described as becoming operative in the context of a particular situation. Claiming, on the one hand, to be in league with Gilead and willing to join with the Gileadites in the fight against Ammon, the men of Ephraim are described fighting against Gilead and expressing a distinct identity when circumstances are different. The identity of the Israelites thus depends not only on interaction with “others” such as the Ammonites, but also on internal debate and interaction. In the case described in the story of Jephthah, Gilead and Manasseh present a united front against Ammon, a grouping that explicitly does not include Ephraim. And the depiction of all of the interaction, external and internal, uses elements of identity that are depicted as being motivated both by primordial and circumstantial definitions of difference.
SAMSON

JUDGES 13:1 - 16:31
Samson
Judges 13:1 - 16:31

Introduction

Judges 13 to 16 contains a series of wonderful tales about the Danite hero Samson and his exploits among the Philistines. Samson was a man, according to the text, who was set aside from conception and dedicated at birth to a life of serving Israel’s god and, yet, one who travelled freely back and forth to Philistine country, conversing and interacting easily with the Philistines, battling on several occasions with Philistine contingents, and even falling in love at various times with Philistine women. That the text presents such a paradigmatic Israelite as a great and powerful man who judged Israel for 20 years (Judg 16:31) on the one hand, and also describes him relating easily and often with the Philistines, Israel’s coastal enemy, on the other hand, suggests that the text’s portrayal of interactions between these two groups will provide ample material for our analysis.

The stories of Samson have been recognized by biblical scholars as among the most artfully constructed of any narratives in the Hebrew Bible (Crenshaw 1974; Exum 1983; Reinhartz 1992), and they have been studied most intensely in recent years by scholars pursuing an explicit literary analysis (see, for example, Alter 1990; Camp and Fontaine 1990; Greene 1991; Margalith 1986a, 1986b, 1987; Matthews 1989; Nel 1985; Niditch 1990). The focus of much of this work has been on the characters as portrayed in the text, the structure and balance of various narrative elements, on literary forms which appear in other traditional literatures, such as riddles, or on broader literary motifs, such as the trickster or hero, after which Samson appears to be modeled. The standard commentaries have focused on historical ques-
tions and especially on what these stories add to our knowledge of the Philistines and the tribe of Dan, on the uniqueness of the Samson stories and the character of this hero as a judge when compared to other judges, and on theological issues (Boling 1975; Gray 1986; Soggin 1981).

Primordial Features

In terms of genealogy, Samson is depicted as a member of the Israelite tribe, or mišpāhāh, of Dan. This is established in Judges chapter 13, the story of Samson’s birth. His father, Manoah, was from Zorah and was a Danite (Judg 13:2).96 This genealogical point is reinforced at the end of the Samson stories where the text reports that Samson was buried in the tomb of his father between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judg 16:31).97 The emphasis on the patrilineal line is clear. Samson’s mother’s lineage does not figure in her son’s identification and, indeed, she is not even identified by name. The story presents these facts of Samson’s genealogy as a definition of his identity in primordial terms.

However, Samson’s birth also involves special circumstances, both in terms of the angel’s foretelling his conception and birth and in terms of his dedication to the role of nāzīr. Judges 13 relates that Samson’s mother, the unnamed wife of Manoah of Zorah, is visited twice by a messenger of the Lord, mal’ak-yhwh, who tells her that, although she is barren and has had no children, she will soon conceive and bear

96 This reflects a tradition that puts Dan in the Shephelah region between the central Israelite hill-country and the Philistine coast (Josh 19:41). Zorah lay in the Sorek Valley near Beth-Shemesh (Aharoni 1979:26; Soggin 1981:236). According to Judg 18, Dan eventually migrated to the north east corner of Israelite territory and occupied the Canaanite city of Laish (Boling 1975:218-219).

97 Eshtaol was also located in the Sorek Valley near Zorah and Beth Shemesh (Aharoni 1979).
a son who will grow up and deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg 13:3-5, 9).

Reinhartz (1992) has shown that, on a literary level, several features in Judges 13 create expectations of Samson's greatness and success, expectations that are then disappointed by events described in the remainder of the tale. This powerful literary device also serves to underline that Samson is a very special and "ideal" Israelite, one in whose birth the Lord himself had a hand. The unique circumstances of his birth described in Judges 13, together with his primordial relationship to the Israelite sub-group of Dan stated in 13:2, defines Samson as an exemplary Israelite, one who should stand clearly on the Israelite side of the boundary separating Israel from the Philistines. The tension in the tale comes about because he is, in fact, portrayed as behaving in anything but an exemplary fashion. His actions in the story ultimately lead to his death.

Samson is set apart further by his situation as a nazirite, nāzîr.98 Although Samson the nāzîr represents something of an exaggeration of what it meant to be a follower of Yahweh, as an Israelite hero he stands in stark contrast to the Philistines. He is opposed to the Philistines through allegiance to his god, by his abstinence, in his appearance, and even in his strength.

Furthermore, Samson the Danite is distinguished from his Philistine enemies by the "spirit of Yahweh," rūah yhwh, which empowers him in situations of immediate conflict and which the narrative depicts as the ultimate cause of his victories (Judg

98 A nāzîr is "one consecrated by vow to the service of Yahweh" (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951). According to the stipulations of Num 6:1-21 a nazirite man or woman was separated from secular Israelite society by a vow of rigorous purity and ritual prohibitions from drinking any wine or strong drink, cutting the hair, and coming in contact with a corpse. Specific ritualized sacrifices were required in the event of accidental defilement and at the end of the period of separation from everyday life delimited by the vow (see also de Vaux 1961).
The implication carried by these descriptive details is that it is primarily Yahweh who sets the Israelites apart from the Philistines. Samson is presented by the text as the instrument in each situation of confrontation and the \textit{ruah yhwh}, which is depicted “rushing,” \textit{sālah}, on Samson, is the special force which comes from Yahweh and which distinguishes Israel from the Philistines. Note, however, that it is not presented as an \textit{a priori} primordial force but as special power specific to unique situations.

However, Samson, as an “ideal” or “amplified” Israelite — one whose mother was singled out for special attention by Yahweh’s messenger, one who was a \textit{nāzir}, one with great strength and prowess, and one upon whom the spirit of the Lord rested more than once — is a failure. It seems very unlikely that the Deuteronomistic historian intended to argue that all Israelites should behave as this “ideal” Israelite did. Indeed, it seems very likely that the message was intended to be just the opposite: no Israelite should consort with the “enemy” as much as Samson did, not even one as “ideal” or as unique as Samson. In other words, in no circumstances should the kind of relations with the Philistines that Samson exemplifies be imitated by other Israelites.

Samson’s enemies, the Philistines, are depicted as paradigmatic “other,” and his relations with them are anything but sedate. Samson is attracted by the women and attacked by the men. He is pictured caught between two forces, one centripetal, with the potential to lead to alliance through marriage, and the other centrifugal, with the potential to lead to further differentiation through conflict. But in all of the narrations...\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{99} See also 16:28 which describes Samson’s final request for Yahweh’s assistance. However, it is notable that, though Samson does display his strength one more time and does achieve his revenge, the appearance of the \textit{ruah yhwh} is implied only. The words do not actually appear in the text.
tives, the Philistines are pictured as primordially distinct from Samson and the Israelites.

First, the Philistines are distinct for the very good primordial reason that they have a different group name, a sign that is, in effect, an ethnic label. The name presupposes that the audience knows the identity of the Philistines. The label also presupposes that the Philistines are distinct from the Israelites and implies that this difference is rooted in prior, although unspecified, conditions.

However, the animosity that is depicted between Samson and the Philistines is predicated upon particular circumstances. Indeed, each distinction, or lack of distinction, as the case may be, is described as being dependent upon specific circumstances. For example, the territorial boundary between the Israelites and the Philistines is very permeable. Samson is pictured going down to Timnah in Judges 14:1 where he sees a Philistine woman whom he decides he would like to marry. In verse 7 of the same chapter he again goes down freely and talks to the woman. The only hindrance Samson experiences to free passage between his home and Philistia is the young lion (Judg 14:5-6) but it does not stop him from moving back and forth as he desires. Indeed, Samson is described returning to Philistia a number of times. In 15:1 he goes down at the time of the harvest to attempt to renew his relationship with the Timnite woman and her family, in 16:1 he visits Gaza and a prostitute there, and in 16:4ff. he travels...

100 For recent research on the history of the Philistines, see Dothan and Dothan (1992) and the classic Dothan (1982). The issue of Philistine ethnicity has received some attention, although primarily from an archaeological perspective. See, for example, Bunimovitz (1990). According to references in Amos 9:7 and Jeremiah 47:4, and implied in Gen 10:14, the Philistines were associated by the biblical writers with the Aegean island of Crete. But no matter where they originated, the Philistines were pictured as “outsiders,” distinct and different, and enemies of Israel. See, for example, 1 Sam 4 - 6 (the Philistine defeat Israel and capture the ark of the covenant); 1 Sam 13:19-22 (the Philistine monopoly on iron technology); 1 Sam 28 - 31 (the defeat of Israel under Saul by the Philistines); 2 Sam 5:17-25 (David’s victories over the Philistines).
down to Delilah in the Valley of Sorek. Furthermore, the text describes the Philistines coming up unimpeded against the Israelites after Samson has killed some of them in response to their violence against the woman of Timnah and her family (Judg 15:9). In addition, Samson’s family is able to come down to retrieve his body for burial in the family tomb (Judg 16:31) following his final act of revenge against the Philistines and his suicide.

These cases show that when we focus on the interactions between the two groups, there is little, if any, territorial barrier depicted between the Israelites and the Philistines. Territoriality is neither a primordial feature in Samson’s interactions nor are any territorial lines drawn firmly in response to particular circumstances. Although the descriptions suggest that the Danites and Judah were located in different regions than were the Philistines, this is not portrayed as a strong marker of difference between the two groups that necessarily keeps members of the groups apart.

Samson is, as already noted, described as a member of the Israelite sub-group, Dan (Judg 13:2), but no explanation is supplied for the origin of his group or description of the circumstances leading to the occupation of the territory depicted in the setting of the narrative.101 Thus the label Dan reflects the writer’s primordial understanding of Dan’s (and, therefore, Samson’s) place in the structures of Israelite society.

101 Dan was the son of the eponymous ancestor of Israel, Jacob, through Bilhah, the maid-servant of his wife Rachel (Gen 30:1-6). According to the tradition of Josh 19:40-48, and presupposed in the stories of Samson, the offspring of Dan were located originally in the region of the Shephelah, the gently rolling foot hills of the Judean highlands, south west of the mountainous territory assigned to Ephraim (Josh 16). There is a further tradition that, because of expansion and pressure from the coastal Philistines, the tribe of Dan later migrated to its permanent home around the site of Laish and the headwaters of the Jordan River (Josh 19:47; Judg 18:1-31), although not all scholars would agree on the historicity of this tradition (see Soggin 1981:226 ff.).
Another Israelite sub-group, Judah, figures in an incident described in Judges 15:9-19. The text pictures the Philistines pursuing Samson into the territory of Judah and raiding his hiding-place at Lehi, lēḥi, or “jawbone” (Judg 15:9). As with Dan, the identity of Judah is assumed by the text and, hence, is primordial. The point for us, in any case, is that both Dan and Judah are depicted in primordial fashion as representatives of an Israelite presence in conflict with the Philistines.

In a similar fashion, Philistine territory is described as including certain cities but without any discussion of the circumstances that led to the cities coming under Philistine control. They were organized apparently into a kind of pentapolis containing five cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron (Josh 13:3). Two of these cities figure in the story of Samson: Ashkelon, which our hero visits in a fit of anger in order to appropriate thirty garments from thirty Ashkelonites so he can pay his debt to the Philistines after they solved his riddle (Judg 14:19), and Gaza, which is the setting for Samson’s dangerous liaison with a certain prostitute and the site of his imprisonment and final act of vengeance against the Philistines (Judg 16:1-3, 21-30). The town of Timnah, the home of Samson’s first wife and the setting for his first exploits among the Philistines, was a small settlement in the Sorek valley, on the edge of Philistine territory, approximately 7 km east of Philistine Ekron (Tel Miqne) and 7

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102 The exact location of Lehi is unknown but it may have been in the vicinity of Beth Shemesh (Boling 1975:238). There is some doubt, however, if Lehi even existed at all, given the aetiological character of this story (Soggin 1981:250).

103 Judah was one of Jacob’s sons by his wife Leah (Gen 29:35) and the offspring of Judah were eventually located in the central highlands around and south of Jerusalem. The conflict between the traditions of Judahite versus Danite presence in the coastal plain, the area described in Judg 13-16 as divided between Dan and the Philistines, has led Soggin to suggest that there may be no historical validity to the traditions of Dan’s conflict with the Philistines and eventual move north to the foot of Mt. Hermon (Soggin 1981:226-228; Judg 18). He argues that the movement of the tribe of Dan may reflect a period of semi-nomadism in the group’s history when their ties to the Shephelah were tenuous, at best (1981:227).
km west of Israelite Beth-Shemesh (Josh 15:10; Aharoni 1979:312; Mazar 1990:312). The Philistine presence in these settlements is assumed by the text and, therefore, represents a primordial depiction of their territory.

The Philistines are described as being primordially distinct in the realm of religion as well. They are pictured worshipping Dagon, *dagôn* (lit. “grain”), a common Semitic deity of the second millennium,\(^{104}\) while the Israelites, of course, are described as worshipping Yahweh. Samson’s final act of revenge, pulling the roof down upon his Philistine captors, is pictured as occurring during a celebration and sacrifice to Dagon (Judges 16:23 ff.).\(^{105}\) The contrast which the text describes between the Israelite god, Yahweh, who, by the hand of his representative, Samson, brings down the roof, and the Philistine god, Dagon, on whom the roof falls, drives home a primordial point of distinction. Israel’s god, Yahweh, is more powerful than the Philistine’s god, Dagon, and the two deities indicate and represent a religious difference between the two groups. It is expressed as a difference in the primordial religious structures of the two groups and the distinction remains independent of the particular situation depicted in the text.

A final primordially defined feature that distinguishes the Philistines from the Israelites is that the Philistines are not circumcised. Samson’s parents respond to the news that he wishes to marry the Philistine woman of Timnah by asking if he really has to take a wife from among the “uncircumcised Philistines” (Judg 14:3). In Judges 15:18 Samson himself refers to the Philistines as “the uncircumcised,”

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\(^{104}\) Gray suggests Dagon was a local deity whom the Philistines adopted as their own when they populated the Palestinian coast (1986:337).

\(^{105}\) The fullest description of Philistine religion is found in 1 Samuel 5 which pictures the Philistines capturing the Ark of the Covenant and then having to deal with a variety of catastrophes that follow when they place it in the temple to Dagon at Ashdod.
The Israelites had, on the other hand, a primordial tradition of circumcision (see Gen 17:9-27; Exod 4:24-26; Josh 5:2-9). Whether the lack of circumcision was a simple cultural preference of the Philistines or a strict religious requirement we are not able to say. In any case, it constituted a primordial marker of difference. By definition the Philistines were uncircumcised while the Israelites were circumcised. The text does not describe any flexibility or interaction over this point and it constitutes a clear marker of difference.

There are two additional points that are noteworthy for their lack of importance in the description of ethnic identity in the stories of Samson. First, note that there is no a priori linguistic distinction between the Philistines and the Israelites. They communicate freely and easily with each other at all times and this state is simply taken for granted without any explanation. Judg 14:7 states specifically that Samson went down to Timnah and talked with the woman. The riddling contest during the wedding feast is mutually intelligible and the terms of the wager are culturally acceptable to both parties (Judg 14:12-14). It may be that this was simply a narrative necessity for the Deuteronomist; however, the fact remains that the interactions pictured in these tales presuppose easy communication and so there is no primordial linguistic distinction described for the groups involved.

The second point to note is that, in a similar fashion, there is no a priori sexual or marriage boundary described between the two groups. Samson is able to marry the Philistine woman of Timnah, not without some protest from his parents, but the act can be accomplished with relative ease. Put simply, according to the narratives of Samson, Philistines and Israelites can intermarry. No primordial prohibition against such an alliance is described in the text and, indeed, the events that transpire do not dissuade Samson from this or further exploits. When Samson’s marriage does not
succeed, we see from the remainder of the narrative that, indeed, no other sexual boundaries are portrayed between Samson and other Philistine women, neither the Gaza prostitute (Judg 16:1-3) nor Delilah (Judg 16:4-22).

The lack of a primordially defined or, indeed, any circumstantially defined communication or marriage boundary suggests that these distinctions were not seen by the Deuteronomistic historian as necessary indicators of difference between Philistine and Israelite. This is interesting in terms of ethnicity since language and marriage often do define group boundaries. Their absence in the story of Samson emphasizes that, in this case, the distinctions depicted between the two groups are based on other primordially and circumstantially defined factors.

In summary, we note that, notwithstanding the lack of a linguistic or marriage boundary, the story has a number of features that reflect the primordial side of ethnicity and that indicate clear structural distinctions between the Philistines and the Israelites. These are depicted through the details of Samson’s genealogy, the naming of places, the difference in deities, and in the practice of circumcision. All of these elements are described as a priori markers of difference between Samson the Israelite and the Philistines and they do not depend on the specifics of the situation depicted by the text.

Circumstantial Features

We turn now to the interactive and circumstantial side of the ethnic picture that the Samson narratives portray. As in other narratives we have examined, the overall situation of conflict is attributed by the Deuteronomist to circumstances that are
described in theological terms. According to Judges 13:1 the Israelites had done what was evil in the Lord’s sight, wayyōṣīpū bēnê yiṣra’ēl laʿāsōt hāra’ bēʿēnê yhw, and therefore he put them under Philistine domination for 40 years, wayyitēnêm yhw bēyad-pēlišîm ‘arbaʿîm šānāh.

This point is reiterated elsewhere, in a way that emphasizes the political ramifications of Yahweh’s actions. The reader is reminded that the story depicts a time when the Philistines dominated Israel, bāʿet hahiʾ pēlišîm mōšēlîm bēyišraʾēl (Judg 14:4). According to the picture of relations between the two groups, the Philistines held more power than the Israelites in the situation. The story does not describe in exactly what sphere the Philistines had the advantage — political, economic, military — and no information is given about relations between the two groups in these areas. However, although the details are missing, it is clear that circumstances were such that the Philistines held the advantage. In this particular instance, a power boundary is depicted, one that indicates a facet of the circumstantial side of an ethnic boundary.

The centrality of the situation in motivating relations between the groups is emphasized further by the Deuteronomistic historian’s comment in Judges 14:4 that Samson’s father and mother did not know that their son’s actions (desiring a Philistine woman for a wife) were motivated by Yahweh. Although some primordial distinctions are portrayed, the primary point of Judg 4 is that it is due to the political situation of Philistine domination (ultimately due to the action of Yahweh) that tensions

106 See the portrayal of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4) and Gideon (Judges 6 - 8).

107 The key phrase in Judges 13:5 is yad pēlišîm, the “hand of the Philistines,” with the figurative sense of “strength” or “power,” while in 14:4 and 15:11, the key root is māšal, “to rule, reign, or have dominion over” (Brown, Driver, Briggs 1951).
between Israel (represented by Samson) and the Philistines are exacerbated.

Other indications of the circumstantial aspect of ethnicity are to be found in the narrative of Samson’s marriage with the woman of Timnah (Judg 14 - 15). Here we see an escalating series of events that serve, in the context of the situation, to increase the strength of the border marking the distinction between Philistine and Israelite. At the beginning of the tale, Samson’s riddling contest appears to be empty of ethnic import (Judg 14:14). There is nothing in the wager or contest between the members of the wedding party to suggest any ethnic involvement. As described here, it is a simple contest at a personal level. However, the contest escalates when Samson is the loser. He is described attacking the Philistines at Ashkelon, one of the cities of the Philistine pentapolis, and taking “booty” from people there in order to pay his wager (Judg 14:19). The attack on the Ashkelonites includes other members of the Philistines who were not present at or included in the original wager. The conflict extends beyond the inter-personal limits first set during the wager. It is now a conflict between one group and Samson.

However, according to the story, nothing transpires in response to Samson’s attack. Only after he returns to Timnah again to attempt to reestablish contact with the woman does the escalation continue. Samson is depicted responding to the news from the woman’s father that she has been given in marriage to another by torching Philistine grain fields and vineyards (Judg 15:4-5). This situation thus describes the definition of a border between Israel and the Philistines. According to the picture drawn by the text, it is no longer simply a feud between Samson and the Timnile but, because of the damage done to their fields, the group to which the Timnite belongs is now also involved.

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Their first response, however, is to deal with the problem from within the group. According to the story, their retaliation is not against Samson, the Danites, or Israel as a whole, but is against the Timnite and his daughter. They are described approaching the problem as if it were solely an internal one having nothing to do with another group or a representative of another group. The Philistine response is to burn the woman from Timnah and her family (Judg 15:6).\(^{108}\)

Samson is then pictured crossing the boundary of his own group and slaughtering some Philistines in revenge for their attack on the Timnite and his family (Judg 15:7-8). As described in this passage Samson's response is, if anything, the response of a Philistine, a kinsman to the Timnites. His act of revenge is not motivated by an attack against his birth group, but rather it is in response to an attack against a Philistine family with whom he had created (or almost created) an alliance through marriage. This portion of the tale depicts a situation which, at this point, does not strengthen the differentiation. Samson is described allying himself with the Timnites rather than separating or maintaining a distance.

Finally the Philistines respond in a manner typical of an ethnic group involved in ethnic conflict; they go up and attack. However, it is obvious that the ridiculous is a central point in the Deuteronomist's telling of this part of Samson's story (Judg 15:9) (Soggin 1981:249-250). Note that the Philistines are not pictured attacking the Danites, Samson's birth group, but the men of Judah, 'īs yēhūdāh (Judg 15:10). Furthermore, the men of Judah are pictured not even knowing why they are being attacked.

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\(^{108}\) The economic implications accompanying Samson’s destruction of Philistine agricultural land are not discussed in the story. In effect, although Samson’s actions could have brought about a situation that might have escalated tension between the groups and thus have led to a clearer definition of ethnic distinctions, this does not happen.

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attacked. They have to inquire of the Philistines just why it is they are under assault (Judg 15:10). As well, once Judah learns that the reason for the attack is Samson, they do not defend the great hero as one of their own. Indeed, the men of Judah are depicted doing just the opposite; they save the Philistines the trouble of going after Samson themselves. They advance with three thousand men, šēlōšer ′lōpīm ℣, capture and bind Samson, and turn him over to the Philistines (Judg 15:11-13). Samson, for his part, meekly allows himself to be bound and brought to the Philistines without a fight (Judg 15:13). Only when they arrive at Lehi does Samson burst free from his bindings and kill one thousand men, ′elep ℣ (Judg 15:15).

Three points should be noted about this description. First, it raises a question about the ethnic status of Samson. He is a member of the tribe of Dan (Judg 13:2), and yet he is not supported in this situation of ethnic tension between himself and the Philistines by members of his own ethnic group. This is surprising in that one would expect, where ethnic boundaries were strongly defined, that action by an outside group against one member of another group would result in that individual's group acting together in support of their own.109 This part of the story thus describes a case where the circumstances apparently take precedence over a primordially defined relationship. In this situation, Samson is not supported by his own group, Dan. Second, it leads one to consider the relationship of Samson to Judah. Although Judah and Dan are both defined primordially as sons of the eponymous ancestor Jacob and, hence, Israelites, in this circumstance Samson receives no support from the men of Judah either. What is described in terms of ethnicity is a situation which again overrides potential primordial attachments. Indeed, Samson is pictured in a state where he is

109 See, for example, 1 Sam 30; David versus the Amalekites who had attacked Ziklag.
treated as a complete outsider with no ties to the group. In fact, Samson is pictured in this situation more as a Philistine than as a member of a group which has ties to Judah. Third, it raises a question about the relationship between Judah and the Philistines. Why was Judah depicted so readily handing over Samson? The reason, in this case according to Judg 15:11, is that the Philistines “ruled over,” māšal, Judah. In other words, the situation was such that the men of Judah could not defend Samson against the Philistine advance. In the view of the Deuteronomist, Judah had no choice in the particular circumstances to do anything but turn Samson over to the Philistines. The picture of ethnic relations drawn here is one where circumstances are such that an ethnic boundary between Judah and the Philistines is pictured not being strongly drawn or vigorously or being automatically defended according to a priori primordial principles. Indeed, in the situation depicted by the text, the border is exceedingly permeable or perhaps even nonexistent. Nevertheless, it is also clear on the basis of the tragedy of Samson that the story was intended to illustrate how this is not an acceptable situation.

In sum, the depiction of distinctions that are drawn on the basis of the exigencies of particular circumstances figure prominently in the narrative of Samson. The hero is defined as an “ideal” Israelite and a nazirite in contrast to the ordinary Philistines, but not in primordial terms. Throughout his interactions with the coastal people he is pictured following his own interests and concerns in the context of particular circumstances.
Conclusion

To conclude, we see in these Samson stories that, in the interactions between the Philistines and the Israelites, distinctions between the two groups are expressed in both primordial and circumstantial terms. Some of the differences between the two groups are depicted as being in place prior to and independent of events described in the rest of the story. The dissimilarities of name, territory, religion, and the practice of circumcision are all described as *a priori* structural distinctions that separate the two groups.

However, in all the specific situations of interaction described in the narrative, the boundaries and differences that the text portrays are drawn, or in some cases not drawn, in the context of the particular circumstances. The overall power differential that defines the plot and motivates the action is explained in theological terms; the whole situation is attributed to the will of Yahweh. In addition, Samson, the Danite representative of Israel, is described attaining his unique position through special circumstances. As well, Samson is not separated from the Philistines by a strong territorial boundary, and even though they are understood to occupy different cities and towns, Samson and the Philistines talk and interact like neighbors of the same group, and there is no sexual boundary between them. No circumstances are described to indicate that these features were part of a strong ethnic border between the two groups. Indeed, in the portrayal of Samson’s capture at Lehi, he is depicted in a situation where whatever primordially defined factors may have tied him to Dan or to Judah, these ties are superseded by other exigencies and Samson is left unprotected and unsupported by those who would be expected to come to his defense.
Still, the story does portray boundaries and there is tension between the Philistines and Samson, the Israelite hero. But the picture that the Deuteronomistic historian paints is not of two separate “packages” of people. Some of the boundaries between the groups are fluid. In features that we might expect to indicate strong ethnic distinctions we find none, specifically in the areas of location, language, and marriage. In others, namely name, religion, circumcision, and power, we do find well-defined differences.

As in the other narratives of Judges, ethnic boundaries are described as being fluid to a certain extent. In some situations boundaries were weakly defined. In other circumstances, distinctions were expressed in structured primordial terms. The underlying message in the story of Samson, however, appears to be that such fluid and relaxed boundaries are not to be enjoyed. For, in the Deuteronomistic framework, the story illustrates that such fluidity can lead to the downfall of even someone as ideal as Samson the nazirite.
Conclusion

Our intent has been to examine from a theoretically strong perspective differences in group identity that are expressed in the narratives of the major judges in the book of Judges. We have demonstrated that there is ample evidence for illustrations of identity, segregation, and interaction in terms that we can interpret appropriately in anthropological terms as "ethnic."

Other scholars have also suggested that ethnicity is described in biblical narratives. But the problem with the work of those who have discussed ethnicity, especially that of biblical Israel, is that they have applied the concepts of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic group uncritically and without theoretical awareness or support. They have appropriated the idea from the social sciences and, in particular, from anthropology but without recognizing biases or imbalance in their use of the concepts and without taking into account dialogue and debate within anthropology concerning ethnic theory. And because these studies have not been theoretically clear, their discussions of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic groups as expressed in biblical texts are flawed. The lack of a clearly stated understanding or model for interdisciplinary interpretation is the problem we have addressed here. The aim of this work has been to clarify ethnic theory and to illustrate the theory by applying a model from a position of theoretical strength to an interpretation of the stories of the major judges.

We have suggested that ethnicity can best be described with a model that distinguishes two facets of group identity, one that emphasizes the essential, traditional, and apparently timeless or primordial aspect of the group's character, and a second that creates, recreates, and accentuates difference and argues for claims of uniqueness or similarity within the context of particular circumstances. Ethnicity is very much a
process of identity renewal, reformulation, recreation, and creative adaptation to changing situations. Ethnicity is not a state or a static identity typified by particular characteristics, which a group may achieve, given certain conditions and a specific environment. In certain circumstances, often characterized by competition for scarce resources, claims to ethnic identities may be particularly vociferous and divisive. On other occasions ethnicity may be quiescent, apparently invisible until circumstances arise in which group members perceive it to be advantageous to claim distinctiveness. At yet other times the members of a group may choose to align themselves with a different ethnic identity entirely and to assert a new ethnicity in a new situation. And sometimes an ethnic identity may disappear altogether through assimilation or domination or another situation, which leads to the complete loss of the primordial aspects of the group's ethnicity. These are just a few of the possibilities for ethnic configurations. But the central point remains, that ethnicity bases its claims to distinctiveness on what are presented as essential primordial aspects but in the context of particular circumstances of tension, competition, or differentiation.

When we compare the theoretical perspective presented in this study to the ethnic theories employed by recent studies on the history of the early Iron Age in Syria-Palestine and particularly of the period during which Israel emerged as an autonomous people, it is clear that most writers have assumed that an ethnic group, such as Israel, was essentially static and that such a group could be typified by a certain number of specific characteristics. However, according to the model we have proposed, ethnic Israel can never be described or understood solely as an a priori, fixed, or established identity. Given the processual nature of ethnicity and in light of the integrative synthetic approach we have outlined here, we would expect to see a malleable and changing identity that renewed and recast primordial expressions of distinctiveness.
and created new forms and statements of unity in response to the vicissitudes of changing circumstance.

In this study we have maintained what we believe is a useful heuristic distinction between those social relations, to which the biblical stories refer, that existed historically at a particular point in time, and those social relations that biblical stories themselves describe. Our concern in the current work, however, is not with the first, that is, with the actual history, but with the second, that is, with the portrayal of identity and interaction in the stories. This is a portrayal that, in the case we consider in this work, was created by the Deuteronomistic historian. Our aim has been to examine the descriptions of groups and interactions between groups and their representatives with a model that enables us to present an epistemologically clear interpretation of ethnicity in the stories of the major judges.

In the narratives of the major Judges, the primordial aspect of identity is expressed through a concern with the past, with genealogy, or by an assumption that the distinction between groups and individuals' allegiance is established *a priori*, apart from the specific situation related by the narrative. The circumstantial aspect is expressed in the context of the particular incident described in the story. Usually it is indicated by tensions or conflict between groups or their representatives that may refer to a process of definition, solidification, or establishment of a distinctive identity.

The dominant features of identity that are used in the text to expresses distinctions in primordial terms are group names or labels, genealogical details, and religion. Naming represents an *a priori* labelling of distinctiveness, especially when it implies that there are antecedent reasons for the differences indicated by the labels. The groups so named are depicted in the text as being dissimilar and are signified as such by different labels. The groups may be of a variety of types, from surrounding
“peoples” or “nations” to “tribes” or sub-groups of larger populations. The fact that no additional explanation is given in support of the labeling implies primordiality. The use of such labels within the narrative points by implication to antecedent differentiation and to earlier instances of naming, events that are in the past and unrelated to the subject of the narratives of the judges. Indeed, the origins of many such group names used in Judges are supplied in ancestor traditions recorded in Genesis. In the narrative logic of the Deuteronomistic historian, then, these stories of earlier times are presupposed by the narratives of Judges. It is incidental for our argument whether or not these details reflect historical reality. That the narratives of the Judges assume in some cases there are antecedent conditions for distinctions between people, supports the text’s presentation of the a priori distinctiveness of the different named groups. However, the evidence for the prior separation is not always provided in the stories of the major judges and so the primordial naming is often just implied.

Geographical names also represent a primordial expression of differentiation. In most cases, places, regions, and cities or towns are presented as a part of the narrative landscape associated with a particular group but without any additional explanation regarding the origin of the relationship or the situation that led to the association of a particular place with a particular group. In the stories of the major judges, most of these details of setting, location, or a character’s affiliation with a specific place are set out as a priori facts. The only exceptions are a few aetiological details that, because they are discussed in relation to the specific incident described in the story, relate more to the circumstantial aspect of ethnicity. For the most part, however, particular groups or individuals are associated with particular places in a predetermined manner, as if the relationship were primordial.
In a similar vein, genealogical details supplied for some of the individuals in some of the stories provide an additional primordial cast. By presenting the family line of a particular character, the Deuteronomist shows that the individual's link to the community is not determined solely in the context of the particular situation. Rather, it establishes that a person is related to the community by birth. Again, this need not be historically accurate in order for the primordial point to be made. The genealogy argues that an individual is tied to the group through the most primordial and coercive of bonds, the tie of blood (Geertz 1973). Whether or not it is biologically accurate, the line of descent enables the point to be made in the social context depicted by the story that the individual, as a true-born member of the group, is justified in representing the whole group. This proposition obviously helps to support the authority of the particular figure as a leader.

In addition, genealogical details relating to the eponymous ancestor of a group imply that the group itself has not been defined according to the exigencies of the moment but according to family relationships extending over many generations. This, of course, has suggested tribalism or group allegiance based on kinship through the extended family, a type of group definition early biblical scholars found particularly appealing for their reconstructions of the social history of early Israel. However, there has been much work from both the biblical and anthropological fields to indicate that this model is too simple to explain the full complexity of the situation. According to the terms of our analytic model, references to the eponymous ancestor of a group, whether direct or implied, simply represent an appeal to the group's

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110 On the biblical side, see Gottwald (1979) and de Geus (1976) and on the anthropological see Fried (1968).
primordial nature. The argument is that the group coheres as a group because all members can claim to be related in some way to the primogenitor.

Statements with religious import, indicated in the stories of the major judges principally by references to deities, constitute another important expression of the primordial side of ethnic identity. Yhwh figures prominently in such statements as the god of the people, yišrā'ēl, Israel. In some cases the text underlines the primordial nature of this relationship with brief statements rehearsing key events in the history of the god's interactions with the people. Judges 5:4-5, for example, presents an image of yhwh, god of the high mountains of Sinai, marching forth at the head of his heavenly armies to battle in a metaphysical realm in parallel to the battle on earth that his people are undertaking with their Canaanite enemies. The reference to Sinai assumes an earlier story of Yahweh's interaction with Moses, the leader of the Israelite group on their flight from Egypt, related in Exodus 19, and hence is a primordial explanation for the close association of the people with the god. Similar formulaic abbreviated statements of Israel's primordial history occur in the Gideon and Jephthah narratives (Judg 6:8-10; 11:12-28).

In most cases, the relationship between the group or representatives of the group and the deity is simply assumed in the story and whenever the god is depicted playing a role in the narrative, the god of Israel is always and without question Yahweh. Thus, Israel is titled “people of Yahweh,” 'am yhwh in Judges 5:11 and 13. As well, when a covenanted agreement is witnessed (Judg 11:10-11; 11:30-31), or when the Israelite hero is empowered with the “spirit of Yahweh,” rūāḥ yhwh (Judg 11:29; 11:34).

111 Other religious statements express the circumstantial side of ethnicity. We will summarize these below.
13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), or when a sacrifice is offered by an Israelite (Judg 6:24-32; 13:19-20), Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, is involved. Similarly, the gods of other peoples are specific to them and, indeed, are among the identifying characteristics of those groups: the gods of the Amorites for the people of the east (Judg 6:10), Chemosh for the Transjordanian adversaries of Jephthah (Judg 11:24-25), and Dagon for the Philistines (Judge 16:23 ff.). The relationship between each deity and the group associated with the deity is depicted in the stories of the major judges without any additional explanation or discussion. The relationship between the foreign gods and the peoples they represent is depicted as an established fact.

The circumstantial aspects of ethnic identity are expressed in the narratives primarily through features of economic, political, and religious import. The economic situations portrayed in each narrative principally describe competition and conflict over the control of resources and of significant trade and communication routes. In the story of Deborah (Judg 4-5), some groups are depicted not participating in the battle against the Canaanites and the implication is that this was because their economic interests were elsewhere (Stager 1988). The narrative of Gideon also portrays conflict in the Jezreel valley and again there are indications that economic concerns are the key issue, both in terms of Israelite crops destroyed and in terms of the control of trade. The tales of Abimelek and Jephthah, although apparently depicting conflict between members of Israelite sub-groups, also have indications of the economic issues described by the Deuteronomistic historian which were influencing factors in defining the groups’ identities as a part of the situation surrounding the conflict in the stories.

Some descriptive details in the stories also suggest economic differences reflected at the level of material culture. Israelite groups and individuals are depicted primarily as rural people, agriculturalists with tools and products relating to activities
associated with pastoralism and small-scale farming. Jael the Kenite is placed in a setting detailed by articles related to herding (Judg 5:24-26) and Gideon is described in a farming environment (Judg 6:11). Their adversaries, on the other hand, are often depicted in settings with details of material culture typically associated with city-dwellers. Note, in this regard, the description of Sisera’s mother (Judg 5:28-30) and of the general setting of the Philistines as urbanites (Judg 13-16). The Midianites, although depicted as caravaneers, are set apart from Gideon’s followers by the adornments on their camels and their own rich cloaks (Judg 8:21-26).

Political circumstances that are described by the Deuteronomistic historian in the narratives also take a role in the definition of group identity. We mean the political sphere to apply primarily to issues of leadership and power relations between groups. Except for Deborah, who, according to the text (Judg 4:4-5), was already a judge, *šōpēt*, at the time of the circumstances related in the narrative, all of the heroes are depicted as taking up the role of leadership in response to the crisis of each specific situation. In effect, the role of leader is not pictured as being primordially defined; each case is described as being unique. This expresses the circumstantial aspect of ethnicity, for it indicates the flexibility of the group’s internal organization in response to the exigencies of the particular external situation. There is no *a priori* hierarchical structure defined. In contrast, antagonists in the stories of the major judges are depicted as having some kind of permanent leadership structure, usually a king, *melek*. Deborah and Barak are against Jabin, king of Hazor (Judg 4:2), Gideon battles Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian (Judg 8:4-21), Abimelek, even though he himself is named king, *melek*, opposes the Lords of Shechem, *baʿālē šēkem* (Judg 9:6), Jephthah is against the king of the Ammonites (Judg 11:12), and Samson is eventually captured by the lords of the Philistines (Judg 16:18). Thus, while Israelite
leadership is pictured as based on a response to particular circumstances, their opponents' political systems are described as being more permanent.

Two elements of religious significance are expressed in circumstantial terms as well as in primordial terms. In particular, the overall situation in each narrative segment is motivated, according to the text, by the "sin" of the Israelites. This theological explanation for situations of tension and conflict is applied in the stories of Ehud (Judg 3:12-14), Deborah (Judg 4:1), Gideon (Judg 6:1), Abimelek (Judg 8:34-35), Jephthah (Judg 10:6-8), and Samson (Judg 13:1). According to the description of the Deuteronomistic historian, this was what caused situations of conflict which contributed to the definition of the identity of the groups portrayed in the stories.

The second element of religious significance which is expressed circumstantially relates to the appointment of some of the Israelite leaders in the situation of conflict. Not only is their leadership defined in context of the specific circumstances, but the explanation for their personal authority, power, or strength is also theological. Deborah is described as a prophetess, one who is depicted speaking with the authority of yhwh 'êlôhê yišrâ'êl, "The Lord, the God of Israel" (Judg 4:6). Gideon is described receiving his authority from a messenger of yhwh (Judg 6:11-23) and Jephthah by a covenant witnessed by yhwh (Judg 11:9-11). Samson, also, is pictured receiving his authority from Yahweh through the unique situation of his birth (Judg 13), his status as a nazirite (Judg 13:7), and the occasions when the "spirit of the Lord," rûâḥ yhwh, is described as empowering him in times of danger (Judg 13:25; 14:6; 19; 15:14). Only the character Abimelek is not pictured with the deity's support although, even so, the situation of conflict described in that story is explained religiously as being due to an "evil spirit," rûâḥ râ'âh, that God, 'êlôhîm, sent between the lords of Shechem and Abimelek.
The role of religious elements in both primordial and circumstantial explanations of differentiation indicates a significant point of contact between religion and ethnicity. Religion, like ethnicity, can make a strong appeal to the past, to the primordial roots of difference, and to tradition, in order to legitimate a particular manifestation of unity or to explain and to justify a particular form of segregation. The authority of the primordial nicely parallels the authority of religion expressed, as it is here, by a deity. On the other hand, religion can also be used to explain, interpret, or justify particular circumstances and, like ethnicity, can be changed or adapted to meet the demands of a changing situation. The air of primordial authority, however, enables adjustments to be made in new circumstances while still permeating the explanations, interpretations, or justifications with the essence of past tradition. And so ethnicity, like religion, enables both stability and adaptability, and supports the continuity of the group of people who cling to the security it provides.

The presence in the stories of the major judges of both primordial and circumstantial aspects in the expression of group identities shows that the model of ethnicity that was proposed is applicable, at least to these biblical narratives in the book of Judges. This suggests that the model provides a beneficial interpretive framework for analyzing and discussing features in the stories of the major judges that may be indicative of ethnicity.

We can also conclude that the group identities portrayed in these narratives are, according to the integrative synthetic approach, ethnic identities. What is described in the stories of the major judges is a number of ethnic identities in a variety of situations in which each group is defined both by primordial characteristics that unify and separate it from other groups, and by interactions and events that are particular to the situation. Furthermore, in this portrayal they are not static "packages" of people but
they are flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and the definition of the
ethnic identity of the members of the group can be manipulated and altered. What is
pictured is a special response in each case that is unique and that enables the group,
on the one hand, to create and maintain its separation from opposing groups and, on
the other hand, to create and maintain a particular unity in response to the particular
crisis. The position or response may not be defined without internal debate or con-
lict, however. Deborah’s Israel does not include each and every Israelite group and
neither does Gideon’s. The narrative of Abimelek is largely concerned with an inter-
nal debate over which leader and what form of leadership can best represent Israelite
interests. Likewise, Jephthah is involved in a similar debate between Ephraim and
Gilead. Our analysis illustrates this dynamic aspect of ethnicity with some elements
of group identity expressed as essential or primordial while other elements are
described as open to negotiation. This is, according to our model, a central and typi-
cal characteristic of ethnic identities.

A final point to note concerns the ethnic identities portrayed by the
Deuteronomist in the stories of the major judges. Israel, as described in these narra-
tives, is never a completely unified configuration with all sub-groups or “tribes”
specified and acting in concert. In fact, the story of each major judge depicts dif-
ferent groups in terms that show the ethnic configuration of the Deuteronomistic his-
torian’s Israel is in each case somewhat unique. Benjamin, through its representative
Ehud, is depicted as battling for Israel through the circumstances of a conflict with the
Moabites. But no other Israelite groups are described. In Judg 4, it is Zebulun and
Naphtali which are united in the situation of conflict against King Jabin of Canaan. In
Judg 5, Zebulun and Naphtali are again depicted as participants united in battle
against the “kings of Canaan.” These two are joined by Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir,
and Issachar in this situation to form a group united, apparently, by a common interest centered in the Jezreel Valley. Asher, Dan, Reuben, and Gad are also identified but are singled out for their lack of participation in this situation of conflict against the Canaanites. Gideon leads a coalition of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Ephraim in the same general area which is united against Midian, Amalek, and the "people of the East." Jephthah represents Gilead together with Manasseh, united in battle against the Ammonites. Ephraim, however, in a situation depicted in the shibboleth incident, is clearly excluded from the group unified in the conflict against Ammon. The stories of Abimelech and Samson both depict problems with associating leadership with a particular ethnic group identity. Abimelech's leadership of Shechem is temporary and ends without success and in tragedy. Samson, although clearly defined as a Danite, is depicted acting for what, apparently, are his own interests and without the support of the Danites or even Judah. His story ends tragically too.

The point is that groups with primordially defined identities form a variety of groupings in response to a variety of circumstances, groupings that are described as successful or not depending on the situation. These depictions of situational unity relate economic and political issues as the primary causes which bring primordially defined groups together under common interests.

Israel as a whole appears only in the primordial expressions of unity under the god Yahweh and in the Deuteronomistic historian's descriptions of situations of sin and apostasy. Yet the picture of them in the stories of the major judges is in general of a fluid configuration of people. Never is there a picture of a completely unified Israel with all sub-groups or "tribes" acting in concert. Some groups are described banding together in certain situations to meet particular needs. Other situations are pictured in which people whom we would expect from other biblical texts to all be
members of ethnic "Israel" are, in fact, in conflict with each other. Given the model of ethnicity we have proposed, this should not be unexpected. What is required for ethnicity is that the group's identity should be expressed in terms that refer both to the primordiality of the group's cohesiveness and to the flexible and adaptable aspects of the group's unity as it responds to changing circumstances. Both facets of ethnicity are expressed in the narratives we have examined and so we are justified in claiming that, in terms of the interpretive model we have proposed, ethnic groups are indeed portrayed in these texts. If there are historical implications to this observation, however, these remain to be explored.
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