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Identities Portrayed and Integrated. II. Recycled Identities. Reapplied Biblical Identities, from Hellenistic Antiquity to the Present, within Jewish Polities

Abstract: We discuss the role of identity reapplication in early Israeli sovereign rhetoric concerning the state's alliance with the local Druze population: their annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Nabi Shu'ayb, identified with Jethro, was quite evocatively convenient for "reasserting", as though, the kinship of Moses and Jethro, and the alliance between the Children of Israel and Jethro's offspring. This is something that dovetailed with a Druze pattern in intercommunal relations. It has precedents in Jewish sovereign rhetoric, in the Hellenistic period: the Hasmonean dynasty's alliance with the Idumean nobility and with part of the Iturean nobility, identifying them with the identities of Edom and Ishmael was central, as being an alternative to the Greek (or Homeric) frame of discourse of Hellenistic geopolitics. The Hasmonean dynasty ruling Judaea, as well as the Nabataean polity in Transjordan, represented nativist resurgence within Hellenistic geopolitics.

Key Words: Group identity reapplication; Hasmonean monarchy, Hellenistic period; State of Israel; Israeli Druzes; Jethro; King David; Israeli Circassians; Itureans, Hellenised Idumeans; Syria's historical prestige in the Maghreb; Lebanon in the 1980s; Amal; "Joshua the Robber".

Abstract

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1. Edom and Ishmael, Idumeans and Itureans under the Hasmoneans

Reapplied identities has been a crucial concept from Hellenistic times well into the Middle Ages. Reapplied identities are a broad concept, exceeding our present scope, which is the Other within the Land of Canaan. Reapplication, by the Hasmonaean dynasty, of the identities of Edom and Ishmael is central to nativist resurgence within Hellenistic geopolitics, as shown by Doron Mendels (1996). The Hasmonean

kingdom had an ambiguous relation to the Hellenistic world: the polity was managed indistinguishably from gentile Hellenistic polities, and yet, culture was nativist, rather than with Hellenic roots; the sacred texts were the Hebrew Bible (or the Septuagint), rather than the Homeric epics. Doron Mendels has shown how Hasmonean expansionism, as well as the perceived need to assimilate neighbours, was subserved by a co-opting device that would identify current peoples with Ishmael and Esau, each in his own way reconciled to Israel in both Patriarchal and Hasmonean times. The Idumean (Edomite) elite in the south, and part of the Iturean elite in the north (these were identified as Ishmaelites), converted to Judaism, and this dovetailed with a Hasmonean rhetoric of the Edomites and Ishmaelites becoming reconciled to Jacob/Israel.

There was a sequel to this. Fergus Millar showed how eventually such mapping of antiquity onto the present eventually reshaped how Arabs viewed themselves, and paved the way for the rise of Islam. Arabian peoples' acceptance of an Abrahamic narrative of origins was fateful, as discussed by Fergus Millar (1993 = 2006). And we are not going to deal here with the reapplication of 'Canaan' to some European (Slavonic) populations during the Higher Middle Ages.

2. The Druze Nabi Shu'ayb as Jethro

Some such reapplications of identity are quite relevant to relations within the Promised Land, and have even coloured, if not shaped, some attitudes and rhetoric inside the State of Israel. Such is the insistence on the Israeli Druze's identification with Jethro (Nabi Shu'ayb), something the Druze adopted willingly, which in turn led to some complications once niches taken for granted began to unravel in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., in relation to the Golan Heights, and the Lebanon War).

Interestingly, up to a point there has been a parallel of Hasmonaean reidentifications in the history of the State of Israel. The longing for some other ethnicity to be a sibling, was a factor for the overly reliance on Maronite allies not only in the security zone along the border, but also in Beirut, totally oblivious of, say, Maronite need to become reconciled to the Vatican. There is a sense in which the longing for a sibling was a factor conducive to misperception, during the 1982–3 Lebanon War. And yet, there has been a more spectacular instance, so to speak, of the pattern. As early as the 1950s, co-opting the Druze community in the State of Israel found expression in the formal discourse of the State, as well as in doxa for the people, a national vulgate culture, which accommodated the Israeli Druze in the role of being Jethro's followers. The annual celebration at Nabi Shu'ayb was regularly, single-mindedly presented by the State of Israel as being pilgrimage to Jethro's grave. Jethro, you may remember, was the founder of the judiciary and public administration of ancient Israel, when he advised Moses to no longer micromanage, as he could not cope alone. Thus, identifying Israel's Druze with Jethro was a kind of mythmaking that accommodated them into a (neo)biblical grand order of things.

As for willingness to identify kinship of the part of the Druze, Such willingness to recognise kinship between one's own people and another people is well known from Graeco-Roman culture, e.g., when the Spartans declared shared ancestry with the Jews, at the time of their alliance with the early Hasmonaean. But among the Druze themselves, Shakib Saleh has pointed out, claimed kinship to the Japanese after the latter won their war against Tsarist Russia. And when Sir Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), a British pro-Jewish and pro-Druze writer, managed to have a Druze be educated in Britain, and even claimed that Britain should have some Druzes in her

government, the Druze were willing to accept that friendship, perhaps bordering on claimed or desired kinship (Saleh 1989).

Alliance could, of course, also be expressed linguistically as “shared destiny”, rather than ancestry, the latter being a by now quaint tactic. Zaidan Atshe, an Israeli Druze, authored a book entitled *Druze and Jews in Israel: A Shared Destiny?* He was a senior reporter and commentator on Arab affairs for Israel Television, Consul and Head of Information Affairs at the Israel Consulate General in New York (1972), a member of the Israeli delegation to the UN (1975–76, 1989, 1993), a member of the Knesset (1977–81, 1984–88), and advisor to the Minister of Education and Culture (1992–96).

3. An Analogue: The Prestige of Syria for the Maghreb

Claims of shared ancestry as being an expression of alliance or longed for association, have occurred elsewhere as well, in Arab cultural history. Within the broader picture, the 1840s was a time, for French politics in the Islamic world, when Algeria was being gradually conquered: Algiers in 1830, the coastal region by 1834, and the interior by 1847. Elsewhere, I have discussed how a Jewish family in Rovigo, in the Venetia, names their baby son (a future scholar) *Abd-El-Kader*, after the emir who had led the fight against France in Algeria; I argued that this had to do with resentment because of the repercussions in Italy of the Damascus blood libel of 1840, in which the French consul played a major role, while being supported by the Thiers government (Nissan 2016).

During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman authorities admitted into Syria a flow of Muslim Algerian immigrants, discontents of French rule. They had rather chosen to live under Islamic rule, and did so in the Arabic-speaking Syria. Yet, these immigrants caused the Ottomans problems, as paradoxically, they insisted on retaining the French connection, through resorting to French consular protection. This piggybacked into Syria a supplement of the French foothold, even though it would be exaggerated to call it a Trojan horse.

Why had those Algerians come to Syria, of all places? Both medieval Islamic Spain, and the Maghreb had entertained the ideal of Shām (Damascus and Syria), partly because of siding with the fallen Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus (661–750). Syrian ancestry was valued, and therefore sometimes invented, in Spain. Literary production in Arabic was affected. When the Hebrew poet Yehudah ha-Levi (who eventually left Spain to die in the Land of Israel)¹ wrote “My heart is in the East, and I am at the far end of the West (*bi-qṣe Ma‘arav*)”, he was subverting into Jewish longing for Zion an Islamic *topos* of the Spanish or Maghrebine longing for Syria.

4. Foreign Ethnics in King David’s Troops, and Druze and Circassian Soldiers in Israel

Another category is the Circassian minority in Israel. Circassians went into exile from Russian-conquered Caucasus between 1859 and 1864, into the Ottoman Empire (including the Galilee, and the towns they rebuilt, Caesarea and Amman). following the gradual narrowing of Ottoman Europe, as well as the Russian war in the Caucasus

¹ Yehudah ha-Levi or Judah Halevi, a poet, philosopher, and physician, was born in Spain, either in Toledo or Tudela, in 1075 or 1086, and died shortly after arriving in Palestine in 1141, at that point the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem.

causing the mass killing and forced deportation of Circassians (and also Chechens) between 1859 and 1865, millions of Muslims were leaving Europe and the Caucasus and flowing into the Ottoman Empire. William Ewart Gladstone — who in his best-selling pamphlet of 1876, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, couldn't reserve some sympathy to horrors experienced by non-Christians (cf. Wohl 1995) — had welcomed the incipient process, and stated that Europe must be Christian.²

In Israel, the Circassians have been legally and socially assimilated to the status of the Israeli Druze in Israel, including the occupational pattern in military careers. Because of the latter, the Druze and the Circassians have been amenable to such (albeit ambiguously) co-opted non-elect as apparently foreign ethnics in King David's choice troops (think of Uriah the Hittite).

The impact of the resettled Circassians was important: it was their settlement in Amman that began the transformation into a metropolis of what had before their arrival been a ruin only used as a watering place. Circassians resettled in the Ottoman Empire have cultivated an image as a loyal minority with a penchant for serving in the army. This is also true of the 4,000 Circassians who live in Israel, in two villages of the Galilee.

There are varying estimates of Circassian numbers in Syria (between 50,000 and 100,000),³ but what is certain, is that in Syria their higher concentration was in the Golan Heights (where nearly 30,000 Circassians lived). It was primarily inhabited by Circassians, and secondarily by Druzes, whereas local villagers preserved a faded memory of the Roman-age Jewish population of the Golan (Gaulanitis), by referring to some prehistoric megalithic structures as "Graves of the Jews". For Israel up to 1967, the Golan Heights were focal security-wise, because from places up in the Golan Heights like Rās al-Khazīra (i.e., "Sow's Head") the Syrian army kept shelling the residential houses of the Jewish villages in the plains of eastern Galilee (with occasional raids into kibbutzim, such as when all toddlers of a kindergarten were massacred). When during the Six Days War of 1967, Israel was able to push back the Syrian army, the Druze villagers remained (and have had good relations with Israel ever since, even though because of their family connections in Syria, in order to keep up appearances with the Syrian authorities, they have from time to time staged demonstrations).

During the 1967 war, the Circassians of the Golan, acutely mindful of their need to show loyalty to their host country (Syria), moved *en masse* to Syrian-held territory,

² In my opinion, too little attention has been devoted to the analogy of the Jewish exodus from the parts of Europe where they had been more numerous, and the Muslim exodus from Europe and from the Caucasus to Ottoman lands. "At least 450,000, perhaps as many as one million, Muslims were driven from their mountain homelands [in the High Caucasus] between 1859 and 1864; tens of thousands died from starvation, disease, or accidents en route to the realm of the sultan. In 1860, 40,000 Chechens fled the region" (Osterhammel 2014, p. 140). Cf. Richmond (2013), Shenfield (1999), Jersild (2002). "At least 600,000 people lost their lives to massacre, starvation, and the elements while hundreds of thousands more were forced to leave their homeland. By 1864, three-fourths of the population was annihilated" (Richmond 2013). During the 1877 Russian war on Turkey, "Russian troops and Bulgarian mobs killed 200,000 to 300,000 Muslims and rendered an even greater number homeless; when the war was over, roughly half a million Muslim refugees settled in ottoman territory" (Osterhammel 2014, p. 141). Many Jews as well left the Balkans as refugees and sought to reach Ottoman territory. "A number of Adyghe [i.e., Circassians] also settled in Bulgaria in 1864–1865 but most fled after it became separate from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. The small community that settled in Kosovo (the Kosovo Adyghe) repatriated to the Republic of Adyghea in 1998" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circassians>).

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circassians>

all the more so as their town of Quneit̄ra was near the new ceasefire line. When in 1974 Israel returned that town to Syria, the Syrian authorities prevented the presence there of a civilian population, choosing instead to present it as a martyr town. From 2013, part of the Circassians of Syria sought to return to Circassia within Russia (and some visas were issued by Russia indeed), whereas others (from Damascus and elsewhere) chose to go back to the Golan Heights, into the safety of Israeli-held territory. Circassians are negotiating for more to be let in. This is an example of the sheer complexity (as well as demographic fluidity) of the broader region, something that European and other Western information media either shuns reporting about, or is unaware of.

5. A Boast of Amal in the 1980s

It can be seen that the rather benign, but actually redefining and neutralising official Israeli attitude towards the Druze and the Circassians (in the 1960s, there was wishful thinking almost de-Arabising the Druze), potentially implied a quite sinister obverse. After Israel's retreat from Lebanon in the mid 1980s, Shi'i militias filled the vacuum left by the narco-trafficking polity, the Fatahland. These militias were initially identified with tribal subdivisions within the local Shi'i population. Before the Hizbollah militia (more radical, it was said at the time) eventually subjugated it, the most conspicuous Shi'i militia was Amal (Arabic spelling: **أمل** Hebrew spelling: **אמל**), of the 'Amalah tribe (Arabic spelling: **عملة** Hebrew spelling: **עמלה**). Note the replacement of *alif* for the initial 'ayn, for the sake of adaptation into a name that means "Hope". One hope was declared overtly, when Amal stated its aim of exterminating all Jews worldwide. Now, it is important to realise that how Near Eastern radical political organisations have reached this kind of aim has been along a trajectory, and their own perception thereof, that is rather different from what such an aim evokes, as a knee-jerk reaction, in Jews. Whereas the 20th-century far right was the conduit, and whereas in fact the Holocaust looms hugely in Jewish consciousness, Jewish culture also evokes Amalek (somewhat ironically, considering Amalek's own fate), as well as Haman the Agagite from the Book of Esther.

That the Druze were cast in the role of Jethro's progeny, the Kenites, by itself evokes the Kenite's context: Saul asks them to provisionally leave, so as not to be smitten when he would exterminate Amalek. There is a sense Amal almost shot itself in the foot, because if Amalek was the Kenite's neighbour, the Shi'is of southern and central Lebanon are the neighbours of Lebanon's Druze, who in the 1980s had entered Israeli consciousness. There was a serious risk that somebody would launch into perennial orbit a midrashic notion to the effect that Amal's 'Amalah ethnicity (the Hebrew spelling being 'ayin, mem, lamed, he: **עמלה**) was a disguise of Amalek ('ayin, mem, lamed, qof, the latter letter differing from *he* because of *qof*'s longer "leg": **עמלק**). Zany as it may sound, had such a myth been launched, it may have been powerful and persistent; powerful *because* persistent, and drawing its force from associations with the festival of Purim and related exegesis of the Book of Esther.⁴

⁴ The ethics of the precept concerning Amalek is discussed by Sagi (1994). Apart from Sagi's discussion, note that in Judaism, that *decretum horribile* is unrepeatable, so it is neutralised in that it is secluded to the remote past.

6. Welcoming Refugees: The Precedent of Ittai of Gat and his Entourage, and King David

Yet another category is that of the foreign non-Jewish refugees, that has emerged from time to time in the State of Israel.⁵ The issue was clearly more strongly shaped by recent universal conceptualisations (the global emergence of human rights as an ethical master narrative, as well as the analogy with the predicament of Jewish refugees before the establishment of the State of Israel). By the 2010s, an attitude unsympathetic to refugees (whether economic or from war) became usual for the government, even though public opinion has been divided. When the influx of non-Jewish refugees into Israel was small, which was the case in the 1970s in the case of boat people from Vietnam, or of Bosnians in the 1990s, it was “safe” for governments to make a show of generosity. I suggest that for that earlier attitude, one can trace an antecedent in King David’s explicitly not requiring Ittai of Gat and his entourage, who were exiles under David’s protection — to accompany him and maintain their allegiance to him when he flees from Absalom.

This drives home a contradiction between — if we are to adopt terminology from some current Bible studies — the local *anti-elect*, or should we rather say, *non-elect* or even (to some) the *anti-elect* inside the land (“anti-elect” because of a contingent conflict, and yet a very dangerous concept), and the *non-elect* welcomed from abroad. But then also consider that pragmatic considerations prevailed, also in antiquity. We read *Joshua*, but we also come across a relaxation of the normative concerning the anti-elect (somewhat realigned as non-elect) in King David’s non-hostile dealings with Arawna, the leader of the Jebusite community of Jerusalem, when David obtains from Arawna the site of the future Sanctuary (to which, on occasion, Jewish hymnography refers as “goren Arawna”).⁶

7. The Roman-age Hellenised Phoenician Myth of “Joshua the Robber”

Having delineated the complications arising from reapplied biblical ethnic identities, also consider that these did not only come from Jewish quarters, even as early as the Hasmonean period. It was precisely the Hasmonean conquests that gave rise to polemics even abroad. Graeco-Roman treatment of Moses or Jewish “misanthropy” also apparently had a counterpart in Hellenised Phoenician rhetoric, such as about the alleged inscription concerning “Joshua the Brigand”, purportedly found on a North African monument. Philip Alexander (1974) has argued that this was the background

⁵ There also were awkward situations such as Bosnian refugees protesting about being lodged with Israeli Muslim Arabs by the Israeli authorities, which had assumed that because of their shared faith, they would feel more comfortable that way.

⁶ “[A] rare epithet for the Temple of Jerusalem is *góren-Aravná*, ‘the threshing floor of Arawna’, the Jebusite king who gave the terrain on which King David hoped to build the Temple built instead by his son and successor, Solomon. King David acquired (apparently bought) the area of the future Temple he intended to build, from Arawna (*Ārawnā*), the no longer sovereign Jebusite king. I am saying nothing new when pointing out that by one opinion, the name *Arawna* appears to be ‘Aryan’ in the historical sense (it may be in relation to Indo-Iranian personal names), as opposed to the modern Aryan myth. About the latter, cf. [Nissan (2010)]. Jerusalem was a city of which the prophet Ezekiel could point out the origins (which he did tauntingly): “Thy (f.) father is the Emorite, and thy mother is a Hittite” (*Ezekiel* 16:3). The Hittite community in the Land of Canaan was a carrier of an Anatolian culture with Indo-European affiliations. (Abraham, when he buys the field and Cave of Machpelah, deals with the local Hittites in Hebron, by conforming with the Hittite style of business negotiation, indulging in ceremonious compliments, as opposed to the dry style of business negotiation from Mesopotamian cultures)” (Nissan 2015, p. 247)

for some early rabbinic discourse about Joshua's conquest.⁷ Alexander went on to discuss non-Jewish sources to which the Jewish tradition apparently responded: "[I]t reflects a standard charge emanating from a Palestinian milieu that the Jews were 'brigands' and stole the land which they now occupy." Evidence of such a charge can be found in the rabbinic literature itself, in *Genesis Rabbah* 1:2, as well as in a quotation found in Rashi (a prominent exegete, 1040–1105) in the name of Rabbi Isaac who was a contemporary of Rabbi Levi. In those sources, taunts are ascribed to gentiles.⁸

Early rabbinic tradition sometimes seeks ways to reward non-Hebrew recipients of harsh treatment from Hebrews in the Hebrew Bible, such as the Moabite king Eglon, killed by Eude (Ehud) treacherously after he had announced to Eglon a divine message and Eglon stood up,⁹ was claimed by the rabbinic tradition to have been an ancestor of King David through Ruth, a Moabitic woman.

In the case of the Gergashites, it was imagined that these Canaanites left the Land of Canaan and were rewarded with the bounties of North Africa (Carthage, which they went on to establish). On the other hand, the rabbinic discourse about the Gergashites was arguably responding (Philip Alexander showed that in his 1974 dissertation) to anti-Jewish local, Hellenised Phoenician apologetics preserved in the myth, related by Procopius (and some Byzantine authors apparently dependent on him), of "Joshua the Brigand" being supposedly mentioned in an inscription in North Africa.

⁷ Scriptural precepts concerning treatment to be meted to the Canaanites, or assessments of the outcome, sent reverberations not only through Jewish culture(s) in future ages, but also in other cultures as well. These may have responded negatively to the presence of Israel in the Land, while being aware of Scripture: such is the case of the myth, related by Procopius (and some Byzantine authors apparently dependent on him), of "Joshua the Brigand", decried in an inscription that the Canaanite apologete claimed to exist in North Africa. An important discussion of this was provided by Philip Alexander in his dissertation (1974), inside section III.2, "Literary and haggadic analysis", subsection B. Haggadah (2) "Joshua the brigand", pp. 92–105. As that analysis appears in an unpublished dissertation, it hasn't received the attention it deserves. That dissertation is a real trove.

⁸ Alexander (1974, p. 100) also mentions a heretic (in Caesarea, he suggests) who claimed: "I myself saw the Tablets of Balaam, and it was written there that Balaam the lame was thirty-three when Phineas the brigand slew him" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin*, 106b). Like others (e.g., Urbach), Alexander rejected the claim made by R.T. Herford (1903, p. 72) that by Balaam, Jesus was meant. Alexander, who finds that "'Phineas the brigand' stands in exact parallelism to 'Joshua the brigand' in the Phoenician inscription", proposes that the *Tables of Balaam* did exist, "possibly a collection of magical texts" and "presumably rather anti-Jewish in tone" (Alexander 1974, p. 100). Alexander also mentions a folktale from the *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin*, 91a, about "the sons of Africa" of proclaimed Canaanite descent, who came to plead against the Jews before Alexander the Macedon. Mention of Africa having been given to the Canaanites "here is polemical: Africa was given to them, and Africa is where they should be!" (1974, p. 101). Alexander proposes: "Can we identify the opponents of the Jews? They probably belonged to the natives of Syria–Palestine who were neither Jew nor Greek. This rather indeterminate group of people seems to have oriented itself culturally towards Phoenicia, whether it was of Phoenician descent or not, in order to achieve some kind of ethnic identity over against both the Jews and the Greeks. These Phoenician leanings were particularly strong among Palestinians living on the coastal plain." (*ibid.*). "Once we realise that Caesarea was the nub of this dispute, a number of small points begin to fall in place"; e.g., "Procopius was, for a time, resident at Caesarea, and probably picked it there" (*ibid.*, p. 103), i.e., the story of "Joshua the Brigand". Alexander tries to date the various stages of the rabbinic tradition on the controversy, and he ascribes to a calmer period the origination of the more favourable rabbinic textual *loci* about the Canaanites (based on the time of the Sages to whom statements are ascribed: this is a quite un-Neusnerian approach for sure). He also remarks that the Palestinian Targumim show no embarrassment about the name "Land of Canaan", and he draws conclusions from this: "so one must suppose that they were unaware of the accusation based on this fact", and this perhaps is a cue for dating those Targumim (*ibid.*, p. 105).

⁹ See my analysis of this narrative, by comparison to an Indian narrative, in Nissan (2009).

Philip Alexander remarked (1974, p. 98): “The polemical element in this tradition made us wonder whether it has grown up from purely internal Jewish debate, or to meet simply exegetical problems. That it reflects a genuine controversy with non-Jewish opponents is proved by another group of texts which we shall now examine. The most significant of these is Procopius *De bello Vandalico* II (= *De bellis* IV) 10, 13–22”. Procopius relates that:

In that country [being conquered by Joshua] there dwelt very populous tribes, Gergesites and Jebusites and others with other names which are given in the history of the Hebrews. These peoples, when they saw that the invading general was an irresistible prodigy, emigrated from their ancestral homes and made their way to nearby Egypt. Having found there no place sufficient for them to dwell in, since from ancient times Egypt was densely populated, they moved on to Libya. They founded many cities and occupied Libya up to the Pillars of Hercules, and there they have lived, speaking the Phoenician language, right up to my time. They built a fortress in Numidia, where now is the city called Tigisis. In that place are two columns made of white stone near the great spring, having Phoenician letters cut in them, which say in the Phoenician tongue: “We are they who fled from before the face of Joshua the Brigand, the son of Nun.”

Alexander (1974, p. 99), based on Procopius’ acknowledgement of his indebtedness for a particular item of knowledge, to all those who have written about the antiquities of the Phoenicians”, suggests that Procopius found the tale about the inscription from Numidia in one of those sources,

probably a ‘nationalistic’ work written by some Phoenician and marked by a rather anti-Jewish bias. Philo of Byblos would fit the description, for he wrote not only an ‘Antiquities of the Phoenicians’, but also a treatise entitled ‘On the Jews’, which seems to have been marked by a rather anti-Jewish tone [...]. However, he may be ruled out in this case, for a simple reason. Eusebius of Caesarea is the main tradent of Philo’s works. He was very familiar with them, and had he found a story as colourful as this one about ‘Joshua the brigand’ I think that he could not have resisted quoting it. It certainly caught the eyes of the later annalists. It is very likely, in fact, that Procopius’ source was rather obscure and unknown; [...] I have assumed that Procopius himself did not make it up, though it is an embellishment fully worthy of the author of the *Secret History*. My reason for this is that it reflects a standard charge emanating from a Palestinian milieu that the Jews were ‘brigands’ and stole the land which they now occupy.

A modern, pre-Zionist response that basically reproduces the late antique rabbinic response to the charge of the Hebrews having usurped the land they eventually inhabited, is a parable ascribed to Rabbi Itzale of Volozhin.¹⁰

“From what shall I know I shall inherit it...” The exegetes find it difficult to explain why did Abraham ask for a sign concerning the promise of the land, whereas he did not ask for one concerning the promise of progeny. This is similar to the story about a king who was travelling on a road, and saw a dignified poor vagrant. He liked that poor man, he let him mount into his carriage, and gave him a hefty sum, so that he would not longer need to be a vagrant. On the road, he [the King] found a drunk man lying in the mud, and wearing a costly fur coat. The King gave order to take that fur coat off the drunkard and to give it to the poor man. “Your Majesty”, said the poor man. “May I ask you to give me a letter as evidence that you presented me with that fur coat.” The King retorted: “Why didn’t you ask me for anything of the sort about the money I gave you?”. The poor man replied: “Nobody would claim that money, because you gave it out of your own pocket, and everybody would believe that I received it as a gift. But you took the fur coat from another person. Even though you have the authority to do so, nevertheless there is the risk

¹⁰ It is related (on p. 106, under *Genesis* 15:8) by Aharon Ya’akov Grinberg (Y. Halevy), *Itturei Torah* (Grinberg 1965).

that once that drunk man will be sober, he will claim it from me, so I want evidence that I obtained it permissibly from the King.” What this is an allegory for, is that [Abraham] did not want a sign concerning the promise of progeny, because nobody would make a claim against that promise. But concerning the announcement about the land, merely a promise is not sufficient, because it is necessary to conquer it from somebody else, and there are going to be claimants. This is why he asked for a sign: “From what shall I know I shall inherit it”.

8. Current Claims of a Canaanitic Past

To complete the panoply, we need to take the latter type, namely, the reidentification, by some non-Jews, of biblical victims of Joshua’s conquest with contemporary parties pitted against the Jews in some ongoing conflict from the Graeco-Roman world, and update it to the present. In fact, also at present there have been attempts to identify (in whatever capacity) the Canaanites of old with modern non-Jewish inhabitants of the same land. Such efforts have been playing a role in the building of a national consciousness. Suffice it to mention Basem L. Ra’ad’s¹¹ paper on “Canaan and Etruria” in a prestigious literary studies journal,¹² or the endorsement of Canaanite continuity by Tad Szulc in the June 1992 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, or the pageant held in Sebastia in the summer of 1997, about the Canaanite pantheon.¹³ Whereas Ra’ad’s treatment of Etruria is rudimentary and flawed, Etruria as a comparator could potentially be interesting, about co-existence between autochthonous and intrusive populations. Ra’ad’s paper drew unsympathetic responses¹⁴ but is also cited sympathetically sometimes. On the evidence of that

¹¹ According to his biosketch, Basem L. Ra’ad is a Professor at Al-Quds University, Jerusalem. “Born in Jerusalem, he received his education in Jordan, Lebanon, the U. S. and Canada, earning a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto in 1978. He has been an editor and community organiser, and taught in various countries, including Canada, Bahrain and Lebanon”. Also in his books, he has claimed continuity from Canaanite antiquity to present-day Palestinian Arabs, as being an indigenous population suffering a series of invasions.

¹² Ra’ad (2001a), an article entitled “Primal Scenes of Globalization: Legacies of Canaan and Etruria”. When Ra’ad writes on p. 92, “The Etruscans were pre-Roman inhabitants of city-states in what is now Italy. According to ancient authorities, they migrated from the East, from Lydia, in Anatolia, in present-day Turkey, or probably earlier from ‘some [other] near eastern land’ [...]. Yet Etruria’s past has been subjected to mythmaking and programmatic assumptions, about a northern origin or local development”, it is almost grotesque, because his own paper ostensibly lacks rigour (one wonders about the refereeing), and is bent on developing a flimsy myth: “Still, monotheistic books condemn Canaanite culture — just as ancient Greece and Rome anathematized Etruria and Carthage. (*Punic* still means ‘perfidious’; Etruscan ‘pirates’ are today’s ‘terrorists’” (*ibid.*, p. 93). “Like the Etruscans, the Canaanites still appear in our dark cypresses.” (*ibid.*, p. 94). Of course, Ra’ad wasn’t the first. On p. 92, he writes about D.H. Lawrence’s 1932 *Etruscan Places*, and remarks: “Lawrence exposes a pathology of ethnic vilification for imperial self-interest. We ‘know’ the Etruscans were ‘vicious [...] because their enemies and exterminators said so’ [...]. The real ‘evil’, he concludes in the poem ‘Cypresses’, is ‘to deny life / As Rome denied Etruria / And mechanical America Montezuma still’”. Incidentally, traditions about intrusive presences in Italy were not confined to the myth of origin of the Etruscans. Both the classical tradition and Jewish medieval tradition “knew” about other such presences. See Briquel (1984) and Sela (1992).

¹³ See, e.g., Arnold (1997).

¹⁴ “Basem L. Ra’ad’s regrettably misinformed” [article], in the words of a response by Charlotte Berkowitz, printed along with Ra’ad’s rejoinder. Both appeared under the title “Legacies of Canaan and Etruria” in the Forum section, *PMLA*, 116, 5 (Oct., 2001), pp. 1445–1448. Another response and rejoinder, under the same title, was respectively by Wolf Z. Hirst and Basem L. Ra’ad, *PMLA*, 117, 3 (May, 2002), pp. 522–525. Hirst wrote: “We may ask, however, whether the ‘two cultures’ studied in the article really ‘were, by any measure, more advanced than’ their ‘successors’, who ‘appropriated all from them’, and whether they have in fact been ‘elided’ and ‘unfairly’ or excessively ‘devalued in the construct ‘Western civilization’”(89, 105; italics [Hirst’s])” (Hirst 2002, p. 522). Berkowitz began by

paper, his notions about Etruria are rudimentary.¹⁵ Ra'ad's polemic is part of a wider attack on the Bible's role (and therefore ancient Israel's role) in Western civilisation and modern scholarship, better known from a controversial book by Whitelam.¹⁶

describing herself "dismayed" at discovering Ra'ad's paper, right "[a]fter reading Carlos Alonso's description of PMLA rigorous review process" (Berkowitz 2001, p. 1445). "Ra'ad engages in [...] promoting a fraudulent history" (*ibid.*, p. 1445). She recalls that the Bible, e.g., has Abraham bargaining in order to save Sodom (*ibid.*, p. 1445).

¹⁵ Apparently, Latins were the dominated populace in Tuscany, ruled by Etrurians, whereas in Latium, the Latins were dominant, whereas peoples like the Oscii were subservient. There is a realisation in archaeology of an invasion in proto-historical or late prehistorical times of what are now Hungary and the Balkans, but in a controversial book, Alinei (2003) has maintained that linguistically, invaders were carrying an Altaic language with extensive Turkic borrowings, that can be considered proto-Hungarian (thus, excluding that Hungarian only arrived into Hungary with Árpád). He was able to rigorously reconstruct the relative chronology of the unfolding of linguistic contacts of the Uralic languages since the end of the Ice Age. Moreover (something that is apparently strengthened by the now recognised relation of Etruscan and Venetic), Alinei claimed that the Etruscans entered Italy from the northeast, were dominant in the north, then eventually moved their barycentre into what is more or less Tuscany. See Alinei (2003) (meanwhile Alinei has modified his position, reorienting to Anatolia and Turkic rather than Uralic and Proto-Hungarian his search for Etruscan origins). Alinei explained the presence of Etruscan texts from an island in the Aegean, as a community that migrated through the Balkans in a different direction, and suggests that likewise, related people may have taken part in the Sea Peoples campaign against Egypt. In a book review published in *Mother Tongue* and now accessible on the Web, Jonathan Morris summarised it nicely:

This linguistic proposition rests on two historical/archaeological propositions — an uncontroversial one that the Etruscans came from the Carpathian basin, and a highly controversial one that identifies them as a proto-Hungarian/Uralic people. [¶] The first of these had already been demonstrated by the late 1960s by archaeologists such as Hugh Hencken, who highlighted the cultural continuities between the Urnfeld cultures of Central Europe and the proto-Villanovan cultures of Northern and Central Italy, suggesting that the former culture had introduced a series of innovations to the latter, such as hydraulic engineering, the horse, the sword. Hencken also pointed out that the Urnfelders had probably left their signature among the Sea Peoples who attacked Mycenae and the Egypt of Ramesses III towards the end of the second millennium B.C., in the form of ships with prows in the form of horned birds' heads, as well as a name cited by Egyptian sources, the *Tursha* which agrees with the Greek name for the Etruscans, the *Tyrsenoi*, and as Alinei tentatively suggests, with *Türk*.

What put Central Europeans at an advantage was their metalworking skills. Morris remarks, in that same review:

Lawrence Barfield noted that Central Europe was the 'industrial heartland' of Bronze Age Europe, whose inhabitants developed their metalworking skills and by extension, the military technology that would have allowed them to become a colonial elite, capable of seeking mineral resources elsewhere and subjugating other less technologically advanced peoples. In this sense, their exploitation of Central Italy's mineral wealth during the Bronze Age is hardly surprising. Alinei nevertheless believes that this process of gradual infiltration and scouring Europe for high quality mines may have begun as early as the middle of the 3rd millennium, accelerating during the Polada culture. While the rule seems to have been peaceful coexistence between these Central Europeans and the Italic locals of the Palafitte/Terramare cultures, it appears that around 1250 B.C., migration from the Carpathian basin led to conflict and the overthrow of these local cultures, after which the proto-Etruscans moved into Central Italy and eventually carved out their own state that became the locus of the Villanovan culture. [...] What has hidden the Uralic affiliations of Etruscan is its highly variable spelling, although Alinei assures us that its latitude is no worse than in Mediaeval Florentine or Venetian texts. If the Etruscans were a warrior aristocracy that was gradually absorbed by its subjects, then it presumably recruited its scribes from its Italic-speaking subjects, who wrote in a vowel-poor alphabet of Semitic origin, thus obscuring the open syllable, agglutinative nature of a Uralic language with extensive vowel harmony. [...]

An article by Ugo Volli published on 20 February 2019 at the media watch site *Informazione Corretta* in Turin¹⁷ was polemical as Saeb Arakat, the chief negotiator of the Palestinian national Authority, had claimed that he could not recognise a nation state of the Jews, because he himself was descended from the (late Pleistocene) Natufians (actually Erekat claimed that they had founded his birth place of Jericho two thousand years ago, which is far too early for the Natufians, who were in the Galilee, not Jericho). Volli's source for this was at a webpage of Al-Jazeera.¹⁸ Erekat's birth place actually was Abu Dis, near Jerusalem. His family, according to their website as Volli explained, had crossed the River Jordan in the late 19th century from Transjordan,¹⁹ his tribe of origin being the Howeitat, whose main area is in the eastern part of present-day Transjordan and the central part of Saudi Arabia.

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, is on record as claiming that "The Bible says that the Palestinians existed before Abraham", and that "The invention of the Canaanite-Palestinian alphabet [was] more than 6,000 years ago"²⁰ (actually, the alphabet emerged in the mid second millennium B.C.E.). Abbas' advisor on Religious and Islamic Affairs, Mahmud al-Habbash claimed: "Our forefathers are the monotheist Canaanites and Jebusites",²¹ as well as "They [the Jews] claim that there was a Temple here. Those are unfounded claims, myths, and rumors".²² The bottom line that one can derive from this is that historical or philological accuracy do not matter, what matters is that a narrative is well-received by an intended audience.

9. Concluding Remarks

Biblical reidentifications (of some Other or of the collective self) as a political statement have been current since the Hellenistic period, and are still at work, sometimes deliberately and sometimes subliminally, sometimes as a claim of continuity but sometimes by way of analogy. Such situations are far from obvious, and an article such as this one seeks to point out occurrences in quite complex

¹⁶ Keith Whitelam's book (1996) was entitled *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*. It was reviewed unfavourably by Baruch Levine and Abraham Malamat, in the *Israel Exploration Journal*, 46, 3–4 (1996), pp. 284–288. "His book comes close to being a political manifesto" (*ibid.*, p. 288). On p. 286 they stated: "Admittedly, the Bible seems to lose interest in the continuing history of the Canaanites once the Israelites displaced or subdued them, and moves on to engage subsequent components of the population who retained greater relevance to the ongoing fortunes of the Israelites. [...] One is left wondering whom Whitelam has in mind when referring to ignored, ancient 'Palestinians'. If, for instance, he is of the view that Arabians lived in Palestine in the early Iron Age, or beforehand, a view that has been on the books for a long time, he should state as much clearly. All Whitelam does, however, is to suggest a bond between the non-Israelite groups of ancient Palestine *per se* and the modern Palestinians, without adducing a shred of evidence to this effect".

¹⁷ <http://www.informazionecorretta.com/main.php?mediaId=115&sez=120&id=52493>

¹⁸ <http://pr.aljazeera.com/post/77064494231/chief-palestinian-negotiator-tells-al-jazeera-situation>

¹⁹ Volli stated, in that same article: "C'è una pagina Facebook con la storia della famiglia (<https://www.facebook.com/Arekatfamily>) e un articolo che la racconta (<https://www.facebook.com/arekat-family/%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/255831057552>). Sono in arabo, ma Google ve li traduce volentieri, se volete. Oppure guardate questo articolo in inglese (<http://elderofziyon.blogspot.it/2014/02/erekats-latest-lie-my-family-was-in.html#>).".

²⁰ Official PA TV, May 14, 2016, quoted from by Palwatch, at a webpage accessible at http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc_id=18123

²¹ http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc_id=18123

²² *Ibid.*, citing Official PA TV, June 3, 2016.

situations at different historical periods, as early as Hellenistic and Roman-age identities, and as late as the present time.

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