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Re-reading Mobility, Settlement, and Religion in Ancient Israel and Judah

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Abstract

This paper examines well-rehearsed narratives of Israel's emergence through the lens of mobility and migration studies. I offer an account of Yahwism's arrival and acceptance in the region through a mobilities-informed analysis and conclude with an exposition of the lingering tensions between mobility and settlement in Israel's religious life and Judah's Bible. The paper aims to demonstrate that we can cultivate accurate social models that account for the relational intersection of mobility, religion, and settlement, and in doing so, better articulate the social grammars and physical infrastructures that establish and enforce particular cultures of mobility.

Key-words: Israel; Migration; Mobility; Religion; Yahwism

Una relectura de la movilidad, el asentamiento y la religión en Israel y Judá antiguos

Resumen

Este artículo reinterpreta narrativas bien conocidas sobre el surgimiento de Israel a través de la lente de los estudios de movilidad y migración. Ofrezco un relato de la llegada y aceptación del yahvismo en la región a través de un análisis basado en la movilidad y concluyo con una exposición de las tensiones persistentes entre la movilidad y los asentamientos en la vida religiosa de Israel y la Biblia de Judá. El artículo pretende demostrar que podemos cultivar modelos

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sociales precisos que den cuenta de la intersección relacional de movilidad, religión y asentamiento y, al hacerlo, articular mejor las gramáticas sociales y las infraestructuras físicas que establecen y refuerzan culturas particulares de movilidad.
Palabras clave: Israel; Migración; Movilidad; Religión; Yahvismo

1   Introduction

As part of a larger conversation regarding mobility and settlement, this paper explores the religion-mobility nexus in ancient Israel and Judah. It begins by examining a well-rehearsed narrative of the emergence of novel populations in the Central Highlands of Canaan during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages through the lens of mobility and migration studies. The paper then proceeds with an account of Yahwism's arrival and acceptance in the region through a mobilities-informed analysis. I conclude with an exposition of the lingering tensions between mobility and settlement in Israel's religious life and Judah's Bible.

Two methodological frameworks guide my work. First, I proceed from the basis that all movement bears the qualities of socially-constructed meaning, by which I understand that all movement is shaped by negotiations of agency and power. As such, societies cultivate and enforce socially patterned norms of space and movement, often with multiple regimes and registers of mobility coexisting and competing. These *cultures of mobility* influence, among other things, conceptions of divinity and religious praxis. Secondly, my work integrates the challenge from mobilities scholars to the entrenched sociological paradigm that society is essentially sedentary and that mobile actors typically exist at various points on a spectrum of social deviance (Cresswell 2006: 38-42; Urry 2000: 7-12; Sheller & Urry 2006: 207-226). Rather than pit mobility and settlement against one another in binary fashion, we can see the ways mobilities both require and generate simultaneously situated by fluid "moorings" (Cresswell 2010: 18-19). My hope is to show that we can cultivate accurate social models that account for the relational intersection of mobility, religion, and settlement, and that articulate the social grammars and physical infrastructures that establish and enforce particular cultures of mobility.

2 Israel's Emergence (once more) in Light of Migration Studies

The topic of Israel's emergence in the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age continues to generate vibrant discussion. Interpretive differences over chronology and archaeological evidence assigned to Israel inform a range of perspectives on when it emerged as a distinct political or ethnic entity in the Central Highlands and what constituted its self-definition, political arrangement, and religious life. Scholars agree that there are significant population density changes in the Central Highlands at the beginning of the Iron Age, but where the new inhabitants of the region originated and how potentially new self-conceptions of ethnic identity or religious association related to the novel demographic situation remain matters of debate (Finkelstein 1988: 119-234; Mazar 1990: 334-338).

It is well accepted that the peoples of Canaan were themselves a mixed-ethnic population that shared a larger set of material cultural markers, and that the majority of the people who became Israel, despite the likelihood that other members of this group came from beyond Canaan, were primarily "Canaanite" in their geographic and cultural origins (cf. Ezekiel 16:3; Killebrew 2005: 94). Yet, the identity of the new Highland population(s), whether construed as migrants, colonists, settlers, refugees, revolutionaries, social dropouts, (re)sedentarizing pastoralists, or otherwise, is also fundamentally shaped by migration of some scale. My contribution to the discussion is to augment our understanding of demographic changes in the Central Highlands by analyzing the data in light of findings from modern migration studies. We must also deal with a set of questions regarding culture(s) and migration(s) of the various groups that settled the Central Highlands and undertook negotiations of group identity, of which clarifying religious identity was a part (Dever 2017: 222-231; Finkelstein and Na'aman 1994: 9-17; Fleming 2012: 179; Killebrew 2006: 555-572). Among these are what role religion might have played in the mobility of Late Bronze Age populations that settled in the central highlands? And, if those populations are understood to be the group that eventually identifies as Israel, what ongoing roles did mobility play in the identity construction of the group? In doing so, I will also explore the nexus of mobility and religion in Yahwism and offer a critique of pervasive conceptions of early Israelite religion as "nomad religion."

Exact statistics of people on the move in Canaan at the outset of the Iron Age are difficult to know with certainty. Life in the Iron Age Levant began in the shadow of dramatic regional transitions in systems of power and exchange that reached their apex in the 13th century BCE. No single cause has been identified for these reorganizations, but changes in climate, disrupted economic and political systems, and movements of various peoples appear to have formed a cacophony of challenges that resulted in a drastically different world than the preceding centuries has seen. Earlier events had already led to dramatic population reductions across the Middle Bronze Age, the evidence for which suggests region-wide decline due to increased mortality rates, transitions of populations to sedentary lifeways, or even large-scale population movement to places beyond the region. Already in the 13th century BCE, patterns of urban dwelling were changing and nascent population changes were underway. By the 12th century BCE, the Levant began to see substantial declines in Egyptian hegemony and the related disintegration of vassal city-state networks in the coastal and northern regions of Canaan. Archaeological data indicates that significant climatic shifts are linked with the dramatic changes in economy, politics, and settlement at the end of the Bronze Age (Langgut, Finkelstein and Litt 2013: 149-75). Such changes in local climates would have been prime insecurity-inducing events across the mobility-settlement spectrum.

Among the evidence for the reduction and redistribution of lowland population centers are instances of settlement destruction and abandonment. Identifying the direct causes of such phenomena is challenging. Was destruction internally initiated by disgruntled or withdrawing members of a settlement, or was it the outcome of an attacking group that spurred flight? Whatever their root causes, identifying the broad trends of demographic change does not answer the question of who these populations were. It is well established that the destruction and abandonment of several lowland sites between the 13th-11th centuries BCE coincides with Israel's appearance on the Merneptah Stela and with the noteworthy increase in small rural settlements in the northern Central Highlands, along with the rise of neighboring ethnic polities such as Ammon, Moab, and Edom to the east, and Philistia to the south (Van der Steen 2004: 96-101). Still, further discussion on the potential motives for movement are needed.

Although often portrayed in modern media as an individual undertaking, migration almost always takes place through the structures of household-based networks, with various members of the social group providing different resource sets for the household unit (Cohen and Sirkeci

2011: 20-36; Greco 2018: 33-44). As a socially-patterned movement that is shaped by cultures of mobility in sending and receiving contexts, migration is rarely an ad-hoc enterprise. Even in times of war or upheaval, households must decide if and how migration fits into their own set of strategic responses to the circumstances (Haug 2008: 585-605; Melander and Öberg 2006: 129-152). We should not assume that patterns of human decision making were markedly different among ancient communities. As do households today, inhabitants of Canaan and the surrounding areas at the turn of the Late Bronze Age maintained varying resource sets and spectrums of response to insecurity inducing events, be they climatic change, famine, disease, political breakdown, invasion, or otherwise. Different actors and communities possessed different abilities to cope with or respond to disruptions in rainfall, temperature, crop yields, and grazing lands, but it is to be expected that some groups opted to relocate some or all of the population as a strategic response to environmentally induced insecurities.

The potentially nomadic origins of Highland settlers have received a great deal of attention with some scholars positing that Highland population increases were spurred as mobile groups strategically transitioned to sedentary life, either as a singular phenomenon or as part of an oscillating pattern between sedentarism and pastoralism (Finkelstein 1988: 336-351; Lemche 1985: 411-435). While the explanatory potential of such theories is promising, we must be careful to avoid reinforcing dimorphic social constructions founded on strict binaries of urban/rural, settled/mobile, or agricultural/pastoralists (Porter 2012: 8-64). The demonstrably symbiotic relationship between mobile and sedentary lifeways, and the reality of these modes of existence as points on a continuum of strategic responses to everchanging ecological and political contexts must remain at the fore of our conversations.

Dever has characterized early Iron Age movers as members of a "frontier agrarian reform movement" (Dever 2003: 167; 2017: 222-233) going so far as to claim that they were "agrarian reformers with a new social vision" (Dever 2003: 191). Dever's focus on the notion of the "withdrawal" of marginalized groups and his label of such movers as "pioneers" sounds similar to Mendenhall's and Gottwald's models in their assertion of ideology as the primary catalyst of movement (Dever 2017: 224-226). Nevertheless, Dever's reconstruction cannot be dismissed *en toto*. He is likely correct that successful resettlement required some members of the Highland populations to possess a working level of agricultural know-how (Dever 2017: 225). Likewise, he relies on a mixed population theory similar to Killebrew's

wherein he refers to "a motley crew" composed of short and long-term movers from inside and outside of Canaan (Dever 2017: 231). He is right to assume that waves of insecurity undulated from weakened urban social structures into peripheral population zones and social contexts. And, his assertion that lowland population relocations were driven by dissatisfaction with present economic and political conditions can certainly find support among the findings of migration scholars on economic and political insecurities as precursors of movement (Martin 2015).

The difficulty I express here with Dever's "frontier agrarian reform" model is two-fold. First, his reliance on Eric Wolf's model of frontier settlement leads him to present a romanticized and anachronistic reconstruction of large-scale migration to the Central Highlands driven primarily by ideological cohesion. Accordingly, he sees his "proto-Israelites" anticipating the moves of the colonists of Jamestown and Plymouth, the Shakers, and the Amish. Second, he assumes that such reforms were materialized through the movement of "a large, landless, disenfranchised lower class" composed of "land-hungry peasants and outcasts" (Dever 2017: 223, 228-230, 229).

Modern migration scholars ubiquitously observe that successful migration requires robust sending frameworks, which include both social and economic capital. Those lacking supportive household and financial networks rarely have opportunities to move (Benson 1990: 9-29; Cohen 2009: 30-48; Waters and Yeoh 2023). Even if impoverished persons desire to migrate, they must have access to the economic and social resource repertoires needed to actualize movement (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006: 167-189; Urry 2007: 38-39). Therefore, migrants rarely occupy the lowest rungs on the socio-economic ladder in their contexts of origin. None of the historically recent groups cited in Dever's work were composed of the most marginalized members of society, but rather, were made up of persons with access to a variety of mobility-linked resources.

We cannot rule out the possibility that some inhabitants of the Central Highlands were drawn to move there through labor-exchange contracts. Hypothetically, such arrangements could have promised land, adoptive social status, or elevated standing in a group. Still, the parallels that Dever draws between more recent historical examples and that of Israel fly in the face of most literature on the ways migration functions in the real world. In the cases of Jamestown and Plymouth, migration was made possible through land contracts and charters backed by foreign military force. For the Shakers and Amish, many of whom were not landless in their places of origin,

land was made available for purchase under the auspices of new colonial regimes. Neither biblical texts nor archaeological finds provide evidence of any parallel circumstances in the Central Highlands. Perhaps most importantly, Dever fails to recognize that even with large-scale population movements, there is almost always a portion of the population who remains behind to facilitate movement (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: 87-96). Thus, it's important to remember that migration, for Dever's cited groups, was made possible in part because some community members did not make the journey themselves.

Rather than posit a mass relocation of peasants dissatisfied with economic or social situations, we can envision groups of movers to the Central Highlands that have moderate to significant resource networks establishing migration mechanisms through household or kin group decision making. If Finkelstein is right that we ought to see settlement of the Highlands beginning in the 13th century BCE, then there is no need to suggest that the transitions we observe in the archaeological record occurred overnight (Finkelstein 2023: 304-305). Rather, from the late 13th century through the 10th century BCE, we see the gradual emergence of several patterns of mobility that concentrate populations in the Central Highlands and then subsequently spread southward into the Judean hill country. The first to move were likely those persons from lowland regions or primarily non-sedentary contexts to the West of the Highlands that had effectively weathered earlier moments of climatic change, political turmoil or economic strain, and who could still have enough resources to initially establish themselves and perhaps their broader households in the highland regions. As time passed, small numbers of lower social standing and less economic means joined more stable groups of movers at various points in time, particularly after new urban centers arose later.

One understudied aspect of population change deserves comment: Mass population movements can be spurred by a variety of violent events, among which are warfare and captive taking. Initially temporary systems of human capture and exchange can turn into robust economics of enslaved labor and trafficking. Such behaviors are not isolated to large-scale societies or hegemonic powers. Ample evidence exists for pre-industrial small-scale societies participating in networks of human captive taking and exchange (Cameron 2016). Whether or not early Israel was a captive-taking society needs further investigation. It may be that, with increasing size and social stratification, the recently embedded Highland groups might have engaged in captive-taking and exchange as part of an increasingly complex tribal

or chiefdom matrix. If, along with the El-Amarna texts that speak of *'apiru*, we are to take the narratives of Judges as containing nuggets of historicity, perhaps such texts reveal aspects of captive-taking that pervaded the broader region of Canaan in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Once we have clarified potential patterns of movement that led to the (re)population of the Central Highlands, we can ask an additional question: What role, if any, did religious identity(ies) or ideology(ies) play in decisions to migrate to the Central Highlands? Although a number of scholars have suggested some role for religious ideology in the creation of new Highland settlements, Dever is perhaps the most outspoken proponent of such a position. In what follows, I pass his assertion that collective religious identity or ideology were catalysts for Early Iron Age settlement transformations through the cipher of data on the function of religion as a migration selection mechanism. In doing so, we can come to a clearer understanding of the potential limits of relying too heavily on any model of ideological-driven migration.

I have demonstrated elsewhere the many ways that religion is an important resource for migrants at all stages of their journeys, and that myriad research indicates religion plays fundamental roles in the migration decision-making process (Trinka 2018; 2019; 2021; 2022). Still, religion is but one factor from among the many that potential movers and their households consider as they negotiate a range of mobility-inducing insecurities. There are indeed instances of religiously-motivated migration, where religious identity or ideology overwhelms the decision-making process—particularly among movers who see the Divine or superhuman powers as agents initiating or facilitating movement. One might think of any number of ascetic movements where individuals or groups have withdrawn to live in seclusion for stated reasons of religious purity or spiritual benefit. Religious identity may also be associated with experiences of persecution in a particular location. One thinks of Mormon groups in the United States, who under social and religious duress had to repeatedly relocate further west. Nevertheless, more often than not, religion becomes a catalyst for group unification after a successful initial migration undertaking. Once some members of a group have moved, religious identity can contribute to building migratory momentum, but the primary reason for movement is not necessarily an outgrowth of religious convictions or praxis, as Phillip Connor posits,

> "Relying on extensive research examining the role of social networks on migration, a steady stream of migrants could be selected by a particular religious group once the first few pioneering migrants settle within a destination country. For example, if x religious group were the first to emigrate, social networks within x religion would continue to cause this religious group to emigrate more than y religion" (Connor 2012: 185).

Social (re)organization following resettlement typically involves movers clarifying cultural repertoires in new contexts. Therefore, later migrants, who are spurred to move by factors other than religious identity, may later operationalize that identity to build or assert social capital at a new destination site.

Building on a social capital approach, Neudörfer and Dresdner have shown that religious affiliation can be a determining factor for potential migrants remaining at a site of origin. That is to say, if a potential mover risks a loss of connections to their social capital network by moving, they are less likely to do so, even when other factors that might catalyze migration are present (Neudörfer and Dresdner 2014: 577-594).

Returning to Dever's examples of religiously-motivated settlement in North America, we see how the earliest European groups couched their journey in religious terms after their arrival around ideas that "new" lands were the gift of the Divine or that their travel was one of religious duty. The social grammar of religiously-motivated migration in the contexts of Puritan settlers is one already informed by Christian and internal-religious competition between Protestant and Catholics to lay claim to new territory in the name of the proper formulation of Christianity. The frameworks of this grammar were established during the Columbian era, an entire century and half before the Puritans set sail. Those driven to explore and conquer during the earlier epochs in the name of God, Gold, and Glory were themselves living according to a set of plausibility structures infused by Christianity's missional proselytizing. No such framework of religious conversion can be identified in Canaan in the Bronze or Iron Ages. The fact that the Mayflower Compact was signed only upon landing on the shores of North America is a reminder that Divine approval of a journey is hard to ascertain until one arrives safely at their destination. However, once the group has successfully arrived, regardless of the travails that follow, it becomes easier to relay a message of religiously-inspired migration back to other potential movers.

In light of these factors, it is difficult to claim that migration to the Central Highlands was driven first and foremost by convictions to create a new religious order or religiously-oriented society. Presently, we have no evidence to indicate that those moving to the Central Highlands experienced religious persecution at their sites of origin. Continuities between earlier Canaanite religious practices and those of Highland inhabitants provide a case in point (Burke 2011: 895-907; Staubli 2016: 51-88). Eventually, later adaptations made by Israelites and Judahites to a previously shared foundational religious repertoire would form novel religious identities. In those contexts, other material cultural lifeways that likely emerged from new environmental and agrarian contexts, like distinctive pottery forms, four-room houses, a lack of monumental temples, and even abstention from pork, can be seen as later formulations that were imbued with religious meaning to promote self-distinction from former ancestors and present neighbors. In these ways, the religious patterns of Highland groups appear to resonate with those of many migrants where religious repertoires tend to expand in contexts of mobility. The outcome of this process is often that migrants maintain religious repertoires that are both similar to and meaningfully different from those in their sending populations, even when they remain connected to social structures from their places of origin.

One facet of the above accumulative religious process to which we now turn is that, at some point likely fairly early on, Highland populations merged Yahweh worship with other regional religiosities. Eventually, Yahweh-centric religion would come to dominate, though not fully supplant, earlier Canaanite affiliations and praxis.

3 Mobility and Divinity in Israel and in Judah's Bible

Despite many difficulties that attend the process of reconstructing the history of early Israel and Judah, it is clear that inhabitants in the two polities shared a common socio-cultural repertoire that included the worship of Yahweh, among other deities, and collective memories of past experiences of mobility in which Yahweh was a primary actor. To this last point, the biblical corpus contains variant memories of Israel's ancestral trajectories that collectively preserve the claim that Israel's beginnings are rooted in contexts of mobility beyond the land of Canaan. The accounts of Genesis 11:27-37:1 and Deuteronomy 26:5 build a storyline of pastoralist ancestors

from the north and east while texts such as Genesis 37-50; Exodus 1-39; Numbers 1-33; Deuteronomy 1-8; Hosea 2:17, 11:1, 12:10, 13; 13:4; Amos 2:10-11, 3:1, 9:7; Psalms 78:43-51, 135:8-12, 136:10-22 form the basis of an origin narrative that situates Israel's beginnings in the context of exodus from Egypt. Later editorial tradents of the texts merged these kinetic etiologies, and in doing so, joined their embedded and sometimes disparate religious histories by integrating different ancestral deities into a single god, Yahweh (Exodus 3:6, 13-15, 4:5; Joshua 24; Psalms 105:6-45). Beyond this, biblical tradents sought to deal with Israel's largely Canaanite origins by recasting the Canaanites as religiously contaminated(ing) enemy inhabitants of a land that was not their own (Joshua 1-11; Deuteronomy 7-8).

In concert with biblical narratives, extra-biblical and archaeological sources suggest that Yahweh was indeed a later external addition to the pantheons of Canaan. There is no toponymic, onomastic, or inscriptional evidence of Yahweh in Canaan or Syria in the Late Bronze Age (Leuenberger 2017: 163-68). The earliest inscriptional evidence that refers to Yahweh as a deity in Israel is the 9th century BCE Mesha Stelae from Moab. Other extra-biblical mentions of Yahweh come from Arad, Ketef Hinoam, Khirbet el-Qom, Khirbet Beit Lei, and Kuntillet 'Ajrud, but none is older than the 9th century BCE and many date to the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. Biblical texts such as Genesis 32:28, 30 and 33:20, as well as archaeological evidence like the 13th century BCE Merneptah Stele, are in implicit agreement that Israel's divine patron was not originally Yahweh, but El, as demonstrated by the theophoric suffix in Isra-el. Interestingly, biblical texts that present Israel entering the land as devout Yahwists do not presume that the Israelites were the first worshippers of Yahweh. The narratives of Exodus 3 and 18 present Moses' father-in-law knowing about Yahweh before Moses has his own theophany experience. Several biblical texts maintain that Yahweh originally came to meet Israel from a southern point of origin or residence (Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Psalms 68:8-9, 18; Habakkuk 3:3, 7, 10; Zechariah 9:14). The dating of these texts has been robustly discussed but scholars generally agree that the passages presenting Yahweh's southern origins represent traditions that pre-date 9th century BCE inscriptional evidence from Israel and Judah. While the inscriptional evidence of Yahweh is comparatively late, we should not conclude that worship of Yahweh was a late phenomenon. Yahweh's association with El most likely occurred sometime shortly after the creation of the Merneptah Stele since, as Smith convincingly argues, there is no evidence of an El cult among early Israel that is distinct from Yahweh (M. S. Smith 2002: 33). Likewise, the argument

that Yahweh was identified with El from very early times is bolstered by the fact that the biblical texts do not record any polemics against El (M. S. Smith 2002: 35).

The avenues by which Yahwism spread to Canaan are murky, though, groups in the Sinai, northwestern Arabia, or the Transjordan could have served as conduits and harkened the arrival of Yahweh worship in central Canaan before the formation of the people Israel mentioned in the Merneptah Stele. Among the prime suspects of religious influence in the biblical and historical record are Midianite and Shasu groups (Jeremias 2017: 145-56). The land of Midian, though not found in sources beyond the Bible, is commonly assumed to be situated in northwest Arabia. The primary points of connection to the region and landscape of Midian are found in the early literary traditions discussed above that situate Yahweh in relation to the South by way of closely related, if not synonymous, geographies of Seir, Teman, and Midian, along with mountainous/volcanic imagery associated with Yahweh. In juxtaposition to Midian, there is no mention of the Shasu in any biblical texts. Biblical authors refer to the people of Midian as Midianites and Ishmaelites. Thus, it would not appear that the Shasu and the people of Midian are one and the same. Debate continues over whether the term Shasu is an ethnonym or social classification. The label Midianite may indicate either toponymic or ethnic ties, but it is not a social designation. What seems likely is that Shasu and Midianite groups were in contact during the Late Bronze Age, and therefore potentially participated in cultural exchange, among other things. Smith reckons then that the biblical memory of Yahweh coming from Midian must be "a secondary mediation" whereby the Shasu shared their Yahweh worship with Midianites (M. S. Smith 2002, 32-33; 2017: 23-44). By contrast, Miller has argued that the Egyptian evidence relating the Shasu with a land of *Yah/Yau* is not proof that Yahweh lived in that land, nor that the Shasu venerated Yahweh there (Miller 2021: 79-92). By Miller's account, Yahweh was a Midianite deity that was adopted by Shasu and Shasu-like tribes. Following this model of transference, Shasu groups present in eastern and northern Canaan in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages might have engaged with Highland inhabitants, perhaps even being among their numbers. If this scenario is the case, Yahweh could have been introduced to the region fairly early along with collective stories of migration that resonated with other Highland groups that may have had similarly mobile settlement trajectories.

If our reconstructions of religious life in the Central Highlands are built on the premise that Yahwism came to the region through migrants

or other mobile groups, we should raise a question regarding the nature of religion in contexts of mobility so as to clarify the degree to which Yahwism's tradents understood the worship of Yahweh to be linked with or informed by mobility. Starting from a broader migration-religion nexus, we can investigate where there are unique religious behaviors, ideas, or even systems of practice that emerge from or are instigated by experiences of migration/movement? Subsequently, we can apply the findings from modern studies of such questions to our evidential corpus for early Israel.

Earlier modern scholarship on Israelite origins and religion frequently drew connections between the contents of Israelite religion and nomadic lifeways, suggesting that there was something qualitatively different about Israelite religion because of its association with mobile groups. Albrecht Alt was an influential proponent of this perspective, and much scholarship since him has reiterated aspects of a fundamentally "nomadic" nature of Israelite ancestral religion (Alt 1968: 4-100). Mario Liverani is another prominent voice in the conversation as he explores what he designates "nomadic religion" in the Late Bronze Age Amorite populations, a nebulously defined group often romanticized for both their mobility and purportedly distinct religiosities. Of their "nomadic religion," Liverani writes, "Regarding the religious beliefs of these groups, there is little evidence … Nonetheless it is clear that pastoral religion was different from agrarian religion" (Liverani 2014: 345). Liverani goes on to claim that pastoralist and nomadic

> "religion was more abstract, less concerned with rituals, myths and depictions, but far more interested in sacred locations, such as tombs of ancestors, sacred areas for seasonal meetings, temples located outside city. This preference was a clear consequence of the transhumant nature of these communities, providing sacred meeting points for the various tribal groups living in the area" (Liverani 2014, 345-346).

Models of nomad religion are not limited to observations about different modes of praxis or belief, but are often extended to include discussions of divinity. Thus, Liverani writes, "[El] was the clearest expression of the religious beliefs of pastoral and nomadic groups" (Liverani 2014: 345). In a similar way, association of the moon god, Sîn, with nomadic peoples is also common, even though plenty of texts indicates that worship of Sîn was not an exclusive to "nomadic" or "pastoralist" groups (Foster 2005: 758-761; Snell 2010: 45). Liverani is not alone among prominent commentators advancing

an argument for dimorphic models of religiosity. In lockstep, Karel van der Toorn writes: "People with a background in pastoral nomadism tended to worship family gods from tribal sanctuaries in the land of their ancestors" (van der Toorn 2017: 22). Per van der Toorn, what exactly qualifies one as having "a background in pastoral nomadism" is difficult to discern. Across the history of the ancient Near East one can track extensive transhumance and cyclical processes of mobilization/(re)sedentarization that took place across overlapping "ancestral homelands."   Thus, regional patterns of pilgrimage to sacred sites or grave areas commonly brought those with "a background in pastoral nomadism" into the same religious spaces as others who might not claim that same self-designation.

One can see the immediate difficulties inherent in assuming that all pastoral peoples shared a religious orientation toward abstract belief over concrete practice. Not only is such a claim reductionistic, it also contrasts with mountains of data that demonstrate embodied praxis at the forefront of migrants' religious repertoires (Franzt 2010; Shoeb, Weinstein and Halpern 2007; Trinka 2019; Vásquez and Knott 2014). When reading the modern data against the backdrop of Steven Rosen's research on ancient cultic sites in the Negev, one sees that the modern data on migrants' religious practices does not signal some recent change in mobility-informed religiosities, but rather indicate that religious expression among mobile populations has never been limited to abstract belief (Rosen 2015: 38-47). The forms of praxis that one might have earlier assigned a "nomadic" label to, like acts of traveling for ancestral veneration, pilgrimage to sacred sites, and season-specific festivals requiring travel, are in reality religious phenomena shared across the mobility spectrum and frequently present among more sedentary populations.

The root of this problem runs deeper than studies of Israelite religions or the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. Seeking to differentiate modern forms of institutionalized religion from what are perceived to be less structured religions of the past, cultural historians have long promoted dimorphic models of religiosity based on fairly shallow accounts of the influence of geographic, environmental, or economic factors on religious lifeways. Many such reconstructions are founded on notions that religious life of the past must be distinguished from that of the modern era because the largely agrarian past was dominated by the demands of self-substance, which prompted the emergence of sets of religious concerns that were wholly different from those of the present (Ferg 2020: 37-50; Grehan 2014). While the particular concerns of a subsistence farmer might differ in content from those of a modern suburbanite, the nature of religion as sets of culturally

traditioned practices that are founded on assumptions about superhuman powers and aimed at accessing goods like protection, blessing, prosperity, or longevity and avoiding bads like disease, a lack of basic provisions, things deemed socially unsavory, or even evil, remains consistent across time (C. Smith 2017: 23). We can reasonably say that environmental conditions and particular lifeways can influence the contours and contents of religious practices, but not deterministically, and not in any way that predisposes religious repertoires to be more or less abstract or concrete.

Thus, neither Liverani or van der Toorn are wrong to assume that experiences of movement influence religious belief or practices. They simply undertheorize how religion might function in contexts of mobility and therefore arrive at reductionistic explanations. Across religions, cognitive and practical repertoires are marked by elasticity and expansiveness, with no discernable boundary between exclusively "mobile" or "sedentary" religion. What migration studies research shows is that migrants' religious repertoires often expand through trans-territorial travel and cross-cultural contact. When migrants connect with new communities or reconnect with sending communities, their expanded religious repertoires are added to the mix of ongoing cultural negotiations within the household and broader society (Bhachu 2021: 8-14; Machado 2018: 65-73; Trinka 2022: 31-54). Modes of religiosity can be altered and augmented through movement, just as religiosities responsively shape the cultures of mobility that structure and limit movement. Within this matrix, characterizations of divinity and of divine personhood can be responsively shaped to contexts of mobility and migration, but are not deterministically forced into "abstract" formulations.

The religion-mobility nexus in the Central Highlands logically maps onto the above landscape of religious contact and expansion. After Yahweh's emergence among Central Highland groups, he was equated with or acquired attributes of other West Semitic deities, most notably El and Baal (Psalms 18, 20, 29:1-2, 82:1, 89:5-10; 102:28; Isaiah 6:1-8, 40:28; Hosea 2). For the remainder of Israel's history, Yahweh would be venerated alongside native Syro-Phoenician deities and others adopted from peoples beyond their borders. By the monarchical period, however, Yahweh would rise to the head of both Israelite and Judahite pantheons. Although not likely an impetus of migrations to the Highlands, religion attended the migration process for those who resettled in the Central Highlands and Judean hill country. As different social groups amalgamated, a Yahweh-inclusive worship may have gained widespread support among these disparate groups because of Yahweh's nature as a mobile deity and their own shared mobile pasts.

Biblical authors narrate Israel's history as one in which Yahweh's people come to know who their god is, how he acts, and who they are in relation to him, through different scales of movement (Genesis 12-14; 22; 28; 32; Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Psalms 68:8-9, 18; Habakkuk 3:3,7,10; Zechariah 9:14). In a similar way, collective memories of Exodus and exile are imbued with imagery of a mobile God who travels with, for, and away from his people (Exodus 25-26, 36-37; Numbers 7:1-6; Ezekiel 1-10). The metanarrative of divine mobility is tempered, however, by the reality that conceptions of Yahweh's movement are not uniform across the biblical corpus. Close reading reveals underlying tensions regarding Yahweh's body, his mobility, and whether he has a permanent place of residence (Flynn 2019: 36-38, 43). Textual accounts of Yahweh's mobility were ultimately formed by a scribal class who was comparatively sedentary and who argued that Yahweh had made Jerusalem/Zion his permanent residence. Such contraction and centralization are often processes witnessed in post-migratory contexts once groups are well established in a new location. With Yahweh only accessible from Jerusalem, his characteristics as a non-autochthonous deity, an attendant traveler of Israel's ancestors, and as exodus leader were maintained as historical truths but confined to the past because the migrating god had settled down. This place-bound theology would hold for a time, particularly in Judah. But in the wake of repeated Neo-Babylonian incursions and the Jerusalemite elite's experience of exile, discussions of Yahweh's mobility would once again enter scribal conversations in the form of questions about Yahweh's ability or willingness to travel into exile with his people in the wake of his Temple's destruction, or to rescue them from the hands of the Neo-Babylonians. The prophetic texts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah present variant conceptions of divine mobility, and are evidence of ongoing internal theological discussion which could not be unanimously resolved.

4   Conclusion

This essay has reexamined key topics in archaeological and biblical studies through the lenses of migration and mobility studies with the aim of showing that all societies operate according to cultures of mobility in which religion and religiosity are ever-present aspects of the social construction of movement. Ongoing attempts to reconstruct religious life in ancient Israel and Judah and scholars undertaking critical analysis of

biblical compositional history should integrate interdisciplinary methods that account for the influence of mobility and migration on all aspects of lived experience.

During the period of Israel's emergence, Canaan had already long been a region with many overlapping, and sometimes contestant, cultures of mobility. Israel's emergence is, in part, a product of these early mobility regimes. A similarly complex matrix of religious lifeways and influences also comprised the seedbed from which new Central Highland religious identities would sprout. In time, Israel's (and Judah's) religious milieu would come to be dominated by a deity who also had a mobile past. As Israelite and Judahite populations sought to situate their later experiences of settled life in relationship to their more mobile past, they found themselves negotiating a similar set of questions about Yahweh and his own settling down. Thus, Judah's Bible, a development of the exilic and post-exilic era, captures historical glimpses of pluriform religious debate on the relationship between Yahweh's divinity and his mobility.

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