

## Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere



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*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), 271-288.

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*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

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## ḤABIRU AND HEBREWS: THE TRANSFER OF A SOCIAL TERM TO THE LITERARY SPHERE

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THE question of whether or not the Ḥabiru should be equated with the Hebrews (<sup>c</sup>*ibrîm*) has now been discussed for almost a century, but a scholarly consensus has still not been reached.<sup>1</sup> The Ḥabiru were first discovered in the Amarna letters, where, their name sometimes written with the Sumerian logogram SA.GAZ, they are mentioned as a source of trouble and rebellion in many Canaanite city-states. The resemblance between the names Ḥabiru and Hebrew, the proximity of their location, as well as the close chronological relationship between the Amarna Ḥabiru and the Israelites aroused the imagination of scholars, bringing about the immediate equation of the two groups. The discovery of additional ancient Near Eastern documents in which the Ḥabiru are occasionally mentioned, however, altered this view. When it was definitely established that the term Ḥabiru is an appellation representing a certain social element and that all existing documents clearly support this view, certain scholars even went so far as to deny any connection whatever between the two names.<sup>2</sup> Others tried to solve the problem by claiming that the biblical term "Hebrew" is basically a social rather than ethnic designation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The two basic works which deal with the Ḥabiru problem are J. Bottéro, *Le Problème des Ḥabiru à la quatrième Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris, 1954); and M. Greenberg, *The Ḥab/piru* (New Haven, 1955). Both include a complete bibliography covering the period up to 1953. For subsequent studies and bibliography, see Bottéro, "Ḥabiru," *RLA*, vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 14–27 (bibliography on p. 14); and M. B. Rowton, "Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the <sup>c</sup>*Apiru-<sup>c</sup>Ibrîm*," *JNES* 35 (1976): 13–20 (bibliography on p. 13, n. 2). For additional studies, see M. Liverani, "Il fuoruscitismo in Siria nella tarda età del Bronzo," *Rivista storica italiana* 77 (1965): 315–36; idem, "Implicazioni sociali nella politica di Abdi-Ashirta di Amurru," *RSO* 40 (1965): 267–77; idem, "Farsi Ḥabiru," *Vicino Oriente* 2 (1979): 65–77; Greenberg, "Ḥab/piru and Hebrews," in B. Mazar, ed., *Patriarchs, The World History of the Jewish People*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 188–200, 279–81; G. E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 122–41; H. Cazelles, "The Hebrews," in D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 1–28; C. H. J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel* (Assen

and Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 182–87; G. Buccellati, "<sup>c</sup>*Apiru* and *Munnabtûtu*—The Stateless of the First Cosmopolitan Age," *JNES* 36 (1977): 145–47; N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (New York, 1979), pp. 389–425, 435–85; I. Riesener, *Der Stamm <sup>c</sup>bd im Alten Testament*, BZAW 149 (Berlin and New York, 1979), pp. 115–27; N. P. Lemche, "'Hebrew' as a National Name for Israel," *StTh* 33 (1979): 1–23; Bottéro, "Les Ḥabiru, les nomades et les sédentaires," in J. S. Castillo, ed., *Nomads and Sedentary Peoples*, (Mexico City, 1981), pp. 89–107 (= *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne* 6 [1980]: 201–13); see also my articles "The Town of Ibirta and the Relations of the <sup>c</sup>*Apiru* and the Shosu," *GM* 57 (1982): 27–33; and "The Origin and Historical Background of Several Amarna Letters," *UF* 11 (1979): 676–82.

<sup>2</sup> This view was emphasized strongly by R. Borger, "Das Problem der <sup>c</sup>*apiru* ('Ḥabiru)," *ZDPV* 74 (1958): 121–32; cf. B. Landsberger in Bottéro, *Le Problème des Ḥabiru*, p. 161; K. Koch, "Die Hebräer vom Auszug aus Ägypten bis zum Grossreich Davids," *VT* 19 (1969): 68–71.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, M. P. Gray, "The Ḥābirū-Hebrew Problem in the Light of the Source Material Available at Present," *HUCA* 29 (1958): 173–88, 193–96; Liverani, "Il fuoruscitismo," pp. 334 f.; Cazelles, "The Hebrews," pp. 1–3, 21–24; Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 135–38; Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 417–25, 493–97; see also Rowton, "<sup>c</sup>*Apiru-<sup>c</sup>Ibrîm*," pp. 18–20.

Anthropological research in the field of tribal society in ancient times<sup>4</sup> has made a major contribution in clarifying the problem at hand.<sup>5</sup> Documents discovered at Mari and recently published also contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of the term "Ḫabiru" (see below).<sup>6</sup> Recent archaeological research in Palestine and, in particular, in the hill country where the Israelites settled in the pre-monarchical period also have helped eliminate certain erroneous notions about the Ḫabiru. This evidence encourages new discussion of the relationship between the Ḫabiru and Hebrews and may even offer somewhat different answers to these questions.

### I. THE ḪABIRU IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN DOCUMENTS

The Ḫabiru are mentioned in more than 210 texts written in the course of the second millennium B.C. in many Western Asiatic kingdoms.<sup>7</sup> The earliest documents in which they appear belong to the first half of the eighteenth century. The latest hieratic and cuneiform occurrences mentioning the Ḫabiru are dated to the twelfth and eleventh centuries, respectively. At any rate, it seems clear that Ḫabiru as a general Western Asiatic phenomenon disappeared from the historical arena some time towards the end of the second millennium B.C.

Common to all the people designated as "Ḫabiru" is the fact that they were uprooted from their original political and social framework and forced to adapt to a new environment. The different traits and social behavior of the Ḫabiru in each area of Western Asia are the outcome of this adaptation to new circumstances. Among the reasons for breaking off their former political and social ties were wars, disasters, famine, debt, heavy taxes, prolonged military service, and so on. Recent studies on tribes have shown that the poorest tribal elements, those whose livestock or land diminished to the point at which it was no longer sufficient to sustain a family, often left their tribes to seek a living elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> It should be emphasized that the tribal framework was basically territorial and included inhabitants of small towns and villages as well as nomads.<sup>9</sup> Tribal ties encompassed large areas and functioned as a loose social structure which united many groups and families of a diverse nature:

<sup>4</sup> The term "tribe" is so deeply entrenched in discussions of ancient Western Asiatic society, and particularly in the description of the early history of Israel, that, in spite of recent suggestions not to use the term (see M. H. Fried, *The Notion of Tribe* [Menlo Park, California, 1975]), one can hardly avoid it. For a convenient definition of the expression "tribe," see K. A. Kamp and N. Yoffee, "Ethnicity in Ancient Western Asia during the Early Second Millennium B.C.: Archaeological Assessments and Ethnoarchaeological Prospectives," *BASOR* 237 (1980): 88 f.

<sup>5</sup> See the works of Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*; Rowton, "Ḫapiru-Ḫibrīm"; and Gottwald, *Tribes*. For a complete list of Rowton's publications, see idem, "Dimorphic Structure and Topology," *OA* 15 (1976): 17 f., n. 4; cf. idem, "Economic and Political Factors in Ancient Nomadism," in Castillo, ed., *Nomads and Sedentary People*, pp. 25-36. For

a criticism of Rowton's approach, see Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 889-94; Kamp and Yoffee, "Ethnicity," pp. 91-94.

<sup>6</sup> M. Birot, *Lettres de Yaqqim-Addu*, ARMT 14 (Paris, 1974), nos. 50, 72.

<sup>7</sup> For an up-dated list of documents, see Bottéro, *RLA*, vol. 4, pp. 15-21; for additional notes on the list, see idem, "Les Ḫabiru," pp. 90 f., n. 4. Bottéro's list of texts includes sources which concern the *ḫabbatu* as well as others which mention only personal names.

<sup>8</sup> Rowton, "Ḫapiru-Ḫibrīm," p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> The importance of the territorial factor for the study of tribal society was emphasized by Mendenhall, in "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962): 69-71; cf. idem, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 174-78; Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 294-98, 470, with additional bibliography.

farmers, nomads, and sometimes even members of urban populations. Thus, the discussion of migrants from the tribal sector is by no means restricted to people of nomadic background. Indeed, J. Bottéro has recently demonstrated that most of the people designated as “Ḥabiru,” insofar as their background can be established, actually came from the sedentary population and not from among the nomads.<sup>10</sup> They originated from the two major sectors of the “dimorphic society” of the ancient Near East—the urban and the tribal—and were an intermediate social element between these two groups.

As it happened, individuals sometimes moved from their homeland to neighboring countries and served either in the public or private sector for subsistence or wages. Usually, however, they did not migrate alone but formed a band. These bands were independent bodies and were restricted in number and unified, often having a single prominent leader. No further hierarchy or institutional organization was needed for this tiny social structure, and it is for this reason that none of the institutions which typify either clan or tribe ever appeared in connection with the Ḥabiru.<sup>11</sup> The predatory nature of the bands was a direct outcome of their social status. M. B. Rowton emphasized that “in tribal society the most predatory elements were usually the small and poor tribes or tribal splinter groups. These lacked the strength to assert their claim to pasture. As a result they would turn to brigandage.”<sup>12</sup> This statement is even more true of the groups of Ḥabiru who had neither tribal territory nor large fields and herds, and they often became dangerous to sedentary society. On occasion, however, they served as mercenaries to rulers in neighboring areas, and service in the armies of established kingdoms opened the way for the re-integration of the Ḥabiru into sedentary society and may have even been a stepping-stone to a military career for a leader of a band.<sup>13</sup> Further details about the Ḥabiru-bands and their origin, organization, and activity can be gleaned from the Bible, as I hope to show below.

The social status “Ḥabiru,” i.e., “uprooted migrants,” did not last very long.<sup>14</sup> The stable organization of these bands, mainly based on the personality of their leader and cohesion of their members, was shortlived. Sooner or later their members married, had children, and their number expanded to a degree which necessitated support from a larger political group. Thus the bands appear to have re-integrated themselves either into tribal society or (through military service) into urban society, or may have even formed the nucleus of an entirely new tribe.<sup>15</sup> It appears that individual refugees often became re-integrated into society through their service in ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. One may safely conclude that the people designated as “Ḥabiru,” who appeared in different places at different times in various Western Asiatic regions, had nothing in common apart from their similar social status. Each society had its own “Ḥabiru-people.” In general, the phenomenon of the Ḥabiru can be described as a circular process, one in which people were uprooted from the society in which they were born, lived for a while as foreigners in another country, and then were absorbed into their new environment.

<sup>10</sup> Bottéro, “Les Ḥabiru,” pp. 96 f.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94; *idem*, *RLA*, vol. 4, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Rowton, “Dimorphic Structure and the Parasocial Element,” *JNES* 36 (1977): 193.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Bottéro, “Les Ḥabiru,” pp. 93–106.

<sup>15</sup> Rowton, “Parasocial Elements,” p. 194.

The problem of the etymology and exact meaning of the term “Ḫabiru” was clarified recently by the publication of newly discovered letters from Mari. The verb *ḫabāru* appears in two of these tablets and was translated by the editor, M. Birot, as “immigrer.”<sup>16</sup> Bottéro, however, disagreed and suggested that the verb was derived from the noun Ḫabiru and should be translated “est-devenu-ḫabiru.”<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that the single appearance of the same verb in a Cappadocian tablet (*BIN* 6, no. 226) is earlier than all other occurrences of the term Ḫabiru. The inconsistency in the recording of the verb *ḫabāru* may well be due to its West-Semitic origin. Be that as it may, the light which the new Mari tablets can shed on the original concept of the appellation Ḫabiru is certainly more important than its assumed etymological contribution. To demonstrate this, I present the tablets in more detail below.

(1) ARM 14 50. A certain person, Ami-ibâl, came from the town of Nasher in Ilānšura and was accused of being registered as an élite soldier who had defected from his unit, which was stationed at Ilānšura. Ami-ibâl rejected the accusation by claiming that four years before the assumed registration he had migrated (verb *ḫabāru*) from Ilānšura to Subartu (the reasons for the move are not specified) and had returned to his homeland only recently because of the advance of Atamrum.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear from this letter that there was a markedly perceived difference between a deserter (*pāṭeru*) and a migrant (Ḫabiru). Desertion was regarded as a grave offence, and the government sought out deserters and punished them severely when they were caught. Migration, on the other hand, was regarded as a legal, voluntary act.

(2) ARM 14 72. Addu-sharrum was a Babylonian and an overseer (*waklu* of a group of soldiers, who was accepted, together with his band, as a replacement in the kingdom of Mari. Eight months later, the Babylonians demanded his extradition, claiming that he had defected from the army after the Babylonian troops came to Mari. To this claim Addu-sharrum answered that he had fled from Babylon to Mari and thus was a migrant (Ḫabiru) who should not be extradited. Yaqqim-Addu, the governor of Sagaratum who wrote the letter, sent Addu-sharrum to the king of Mari suggesting that the latter should check to see “if this man fled from Babylon or whether he came up with the troops and then stayed” (lines 30–32).

The two letters reflect a similar problem, i.e., determining the legal status of a man who is accused of being a deserter but who states he is a migrant and thus a Ḫabiru. If he is the latter, he has broken no law and should be neither punished nor extradited.

(3) ARM 14 73. This letter is closely connected with letter no. 72 above; unfortunately, only the second half is preserved. Yaqqim-Addu cites the words of the group of replacements overseen by Addu-sharrum, saying: “Is there a country which extradites its replacements? Not only us: a messenger who was used to hearing the secrets of his lord, if he enters the service of another king, he becomes the son of (that) country. Now, why should you extradite us?” (rev. lines 5–12).

<sup>16</sup> Birot, *Lettres de Yaqqim-Addu*, nos. 50, 72, and p. 228.

<sup>17</sup> Bottéro, “Les Ḫabiru,” pp. 95 f.

<sup>18</sup> For the career of Atamrum, see O. Rouault, “Andariq et Atamrum,” *RA* 64 (1970): 110–18.

The second claim reminds us of the case of David, “the servant of Saul, king of Israel,” who later joined Achish, king of Gath, and was with him “for days and years since he deserted” (1 Sam. 29: 3). Migrating to a neighboring kingdom and serving under its king is regarded in this letter as an acceptable move, even if the migrant had previously served in the court of another king. It should be emphasized, however, that these claims were raised by replacements whose extradition had been requested (see rev. lines 13–14) and who were desperately trying to escape this fate.

Keeping this background in mind, I can now attempt to define the difference between the Ḫabiru and *munnabtu*.<sup>19</sup> The latter term seems to have had a more general meaning, designating various types of runaways, even slaves who ran away from their masters. In certain cases, therefore, people designated *munnabtu* were treated like the *pāteru* of the Mari tablets and were prosecuted and extradited. The Ḫabiru, on the other hand, who were regarded as migrants, were immune from such acts of prosecution. Once their status was recognized, they were allowed to remain (as aliens) in the ancient Near Eastern kingdoms to which they had fled, and in no case were they captured or extradited. It is thus clear that Bottéro was justified in defining the Ḫabiru as “réfugié,”<sup>20</sup> in contrast with the prevailing definitions (e.g., “resident aliens,” “aliens,” “outlaws”), which emphasized the status of the Ḫabiru subsequent to their migration. Hence, it appears that it is only the act of migration, and not any specific status resulting from conditions in the new environment, which defines the appellative designation “Ḫabiru” in Western Asiatic societies of the second millennium B.C.

## II. THE ḪABIRU IN THE AMARNA LETTERS: FROM SOCIAL APPELLATION TO EXPRESSION OF DEROGATION

The largest single group of documents in which the term “Ḫabiru” is mentioned, the Amarna tablets, was the first to be discovered. Most of the tablets were sent by Canaanite rulers to the Egyptian court during the first half of the fourteenth century. The Ḫabiru appear in these letters as a distinct component of the population, scattered in all areas of Canaan. They had an important effect on events which took place in the regions under Egyptian rule. They were usually portrayed as a negative element wreaking havoc in all areas of Canaan and a cause of concern to and complaints by the city-state rulers. In only a few instances are the Ḫabiru referred to without this tone of reproach and accusation.

The Amarna correspondence shows a marked development in the history of the appellation “Ḫabiru.” On many occasions, the term went beyond its original meaning (i.e., a designation for uprooted people) and became a derogatory appellation for rebels against Egyptian authority.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly clear in the letters from Byblos,

<sup>19</sup> For this problem, see B. Landsberger, in Bottéro, *Le Problème des Ḫabiru*, pp. 160 f.; Buccellati, “*‘Apirū and Munabūtū*,” pp. 145–47; Bottéro, “*Les Ḫabiru*,” pp. 97 f.

<sup>20</sup> Bottéro, *Le Problème des Ḫabiru*, pp. 191–98; see also Liverani, “*Il fuoruscitismo*,” p. 317.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Greenberg, *The Ḫab/piru*,

pp. 70–72; E. F. Campbell, “*The Amarna Letters and the Amarna Period*,” *BA* 23 (1960): 15; M. Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine* (London, 1971), pp. 71–74; Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 122–35; Liverani, “*Farsi Ḫabiru*,” p. 71, with additional bibliography in nn. 18–19.

where there is a similarity between statements in which the Ḫabiru are mentioned and statements in which ʿAbdi-Ashirta or his sons appear.<sup>22</sup> Also, the expression “to become Ḫabiru,” which is repeated in many letters from all areas of Canaan, implies desertion from the Pharaoh and his representatives, the various rulers of the city-states, and defection to the side of their opponents, who were regarded as outlaws.<sup>23</sup> The extension of the term “Ḫabiru” to denote elements which were opposed to the Pharaoh and the rulers of the city-states is certainly connected with the political nature of the Amarna correspondence: the letters were diplomatic exchanges sent to the overlord, the Egyptian Pharaoh, and every city-state ruler thus tried to justify his own deeds and to denigrate his enemies. The use of the appellation “Ḫabiru” as a kind of derogatory expression presupposes, of course, the actual presence of Ḫabiru-bands, which were a major cause of disruption in the Egyptian province of Canaan. Since the term “Ḫabiru” had a negative connotation in the Egyptian court, it was extended to include all real, ostensible, or fabricated forces acting against the Egyptian authorities. Of course, this must be taken into account when dealing with the Amarna correspondence, especially when trying to determine the role of authentic Ḫabiru-bands and Ḫabiru-soldiers in the political events and their effect on social and economic conditions of the time.

Recent studies on the Amarna correspondence have made it clear that the archive reflects no breakdown in the Egyptian rule of Canaan. Rather, the letters portray a situation of “business as usual,” one in which the Egyptians were strong enough to maintain their rule over their Asiatic provinces.<sup>24</sup> From an Egyptian point of view, the Ḫabiru were regarded more as a disturbing element than as a real threat to their rule in Asia. For the rulers of the city-states, on the other hand, the Ḫabiru may have been a direct threat, and the Amarna letters supply many indications of this. It is in this context—taking into account the complicated problems involved in the evaluation of the source material—that the historical role of the Ḫabiru in the land of Canaan can be established.

What might the relationship have been between the Ḫabiru of the Amarna period and the Israelites of the twelfth–eleventh centuries? It has been suggested in recent studies that the Canaanite city-state system gradually decayed and finally collapsed during the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries and that large population groups simultaneously withdrew from the crumbling urban society, subsequently united with each other, and later formed the nucleus of a confederacy of the Israelite tribes.<sup>25</sup> Accord-

<sup>22</sup> Greenberg, *The Ḫab/piru*, pp. 70–72; Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 124–26. One of the supposed references to ʿAziru as SA.GAZ (see Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, p. 124) should probably be read differently. In light of several parallel passages (EA 76:17–19; 91:23–25; 132:19–21), letter EA 67:16–18 may be restored as follows: “Now he has g[athered all] (*p[u]’-ḫi-ir ka-li*) the Ḫabiru, runaway dog(s), and has captured Ṣumur, the city of the Sun, my lord.”

<sup>23</sup> Liverani, “Farsi Ḫabiru,” pp. 65–77.

<sup>24</sup> See, among others, A. R. Schulman, “Some Observations on the Military Background of the Amarna Period,” *JARCE* 3 (1964): 51–69; M. W.

Several, “Reconsidering the Egyptian Empire in Palestine during the Amarna Period,” *PEQ* 104 (1972): 123–33; my article “Economic Aspects of the Egyptian Occupation of Canaan,” *IEJ* 31 (1981): 172–85; and J. A. Weinstein, “The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment,” *BASOR* 241 (1981): 15–17, with additional bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> The hypothesis of an increasing withdrawal from the control of the central government, in which the bands of Ḫabiru played an important role, is central in Mendenhall’s and Gottwald’s descriptions of the settlement of the Israelite tribes. See Mendenhall, “Hebrew Conquest,” pp. 71–84; idem, *Tenth Generation*, chaps. 1, 5, 7, 8; Gottwald, *Tribes*, pt. 8.

ingly, the masses of Ḫabiru withdrawing from the Canaanite cities during the Amarna period could have played an important role in this scenario, since they have been regarded as the link between the Ḫabiru of the Amarna period and the Israelite tribes.<sup>26</sup>

There is enough evidence today, however, both from contemporary documents and archaeology, to call this theory into question. First, there are no archaeological indications for large-scale settlement during the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries in the mountainous parts of Palestine, i.e., where the Israelites of the twelfth–eleventh centuries would have settled. Furthermore, there is a clear cultural break in the settlement of these mountain areas between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Also, there are clear indications of the intensification of Egyptian involvement in Palestine at the time of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth Dynasties in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> It appears that the Egyptian occupation of southern Canaan in the thirteenth and the first half of the twelfth centuries B.C. was stronger and their involvement more intense than it was during the Eighteenth Dynasty. Finally, there is archaeological evidence which suggests that Canaanite culture flourished in this last phase of Egyptian rule in Palestine, in marked contrast to earlier concepts which characterized the thirteenth century as a period of extreme decline in Canaanite civilization. The picture of the gradual collapse of the city-state system from the Amarna period on and the simultaneous gradual strengthening of the forces withdrawing from Canaanite society is, in my opinion, untenable.

One may further ask whether a large-scale migration from the city-state system was actually taking place during the Amarna period at all.<sup>28</sup> The assumption that there was is based mainly on the letters of Rib-Addi of Byblos, which, however, reflect a singular historical moment: the foundation of the strong kingdom of Amurru. This event is exceptional for Late Bronze Age Canaan, a period characterized by the stability of the city-states. Also, the letters of Rib-Addi are well known for their polemical nature and tendentious use of the term “Ḫabiru” (see above).<sup>29</sup> The results of archaeological excavations conducted in many Palestinian sites indicate that no important Canaanite city was abandoned during the fourteenth century, but rather, several new settlements were founded during this period along the Coastal Plain and in the Shephelah region. The continual rebuilding of Late Bronze Age towns on their earlier scale clearly shows that the former population of these towns was in fact unwilling to withdraw from urban society and that they actually returned to their hometowns. It is only later, in the thirteenth century, that central Canaanite cities were destroyed and abandoned. The large-scale exit from the city-states and the assumed adaptation of a nomadic way of life in the peripheral areas of Palestine by large groups of people were probably the result of the destruction of many Canaanite cities

<sup>26</sup> For a criticism of Mendenhall's early statements on the Ḫabiru-Hebrew problem, see Weippert, *Settlement*, pp. 66, 82–102.

<sup>27</sup> Weinstein, “The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment,” *BASOR* 241 (1981): 17–23, with additional bibliography; my article “History of Eretz Israel in the Time of the XIXth–XXth Dynasties,” in I. Eph'al, ed., *The Early Periods, The History of*

*Eretz Israel*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 241–55 (in Hebrew).

<sup>28</sup> Mendenhall, “Hebrew Conquest,” pp. 71–84; idem, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 122–38; Liverani, “Il fuoruscitismo,” pp. 323–27.

<sup>29</sup> Liverani, “Le lettere del Faraone a Rib-Adda,” *OA* 10 (1971): 253–68; idem, “Rib-Adda, giusto sofferente,” *AOF* 1 (1974): 175–205.



in the thirteenth–twelfth centuries.<sup>30</sup> One doubts, however, whether the deserters of the Amarna period played an important role in this assumed process of nomadization.

Thus it seems that the Ḫabiru were part of the society of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age, appearing because of certain political, social, and economic conditions and then becoming reabsorbed and assimilated into the same society. One may conclude that no direct link connects the Ḫabiru of the Amarna period with the Israelites of the pre-monarchical period (twelfth–eleventh centuries). The Ḫabiru of the Late Bronze Age, like all other groups of Ḫabiru in the ancient Near East, should be studied in the context of the environment from which they emerged.

### III. HEBREWS AND ISRAELITES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TRADITION

#### *The Nature of the Problem*

Given the background of the Ḫabiru and their historical role in the Western Asiatic society of the second millennium B.C., I can now attempt to clarify the relationship of the Ḫabiru to the biblical Hebrews (*‘ibrîm*). The etymological relationship of the term “Ḫabiru” of the ancient Near Eastern texts and the biblical term *‘ibrî* can be established reasonably securely.<sup>31</sup> The major obstacle to equating the two terms is their difference in usage: the name “Hebrew” served as an ethnicon for the Israelites in particular historical and social situations. The appellation “Ḫabiru,” on the other hand, was never used as a gentilic designation; in fact the absence of a gentilic ending is one of its most remarkable features and distinguishes it from all ethnic names. M. Greenberg, in his discussion of the Ḫabiru-Hebrew problem, correctly noted that “no scriptural passage gives explicit ground for extending the scope of *‘ivri* beyond Israelites.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, one is justified in discussing the Ḫabiru-Hebrew equation only within the context of the history of Israel. By accepting the identity of the two names, one would necessarily have to assume that the term was transformed from a social appellation into an ethnic term. The question which needs to be asked is how and for what reasons did this shift occur in Old Testament tradition?

Before discussing these questions, which have both historical and literary aspects, we must first examine the relationship of the Israelites and the Hebrews in biblical tradition.

#### *Migration from Israelite Society in the Pre-Monarchical and Early Monarchical Periods*

The name *‘ibrî(m)* occurs in the Bible mainly in the description of two historical periods: the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and Philistine-Israelite relations. It is used many times by foreigners, for example, by the Egyptians (Gen. 39: 14, 17; 41: 12; Exod. 1: 16; 2: 6) and Philistines (1 Sam. 4: 6, 9; 13: 3, 19; 14: 11; 29: 3), and also by the narrator with reference to Israelites in the context of Egyptians vis-à-vis Israelites

<sup>30</sup> Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 142–53; Liverani, “Il fuoruscitismo,” pp. 326 f., 332–35.

<sup>31</sup> See the thorough philological discussion of the

problem by Weippert, *Settlement*, pp. 74–82.

<sup>32</sup> Greenberg, “Ḫab/piru and Hebrews,” p. 198; cf. Riesener, *Der Stamm ‘bd*, pp. 115–27.

(Gen. 40: 15; Exod. 1: 19; 2: 7; 3: 18; 5: 3; 7: 16; 9: 1, 13; 10: 3). It refers mainly to Israelites in the pre-monarchical period and is used to distinguish them from other ethnic groups; it usually appears in unfavorable contexts, thus lacking the halo generally associated with the term "Israelite."

One should begin with the occurrences of the term in the books of Samuel because, of all the traditions relating to the early history of Israel, the stories in these books were the first to be set down in writing. Moreover, only a relatively short time separates the events described therein from the date of their recording, and, in addition, the author(s) lived in the same area where the reported events took place. Thus, the books of Samuel are doubtless the best source for a historical study of the problem of the Hebrews, much better than all other biblical sources.

The designation *ʿibrīm* appears seven times in 1 Samuel.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have already noted that 1 Sam. 14: 21–22 is the key to its proper understanding.<sup>34</sup> With the help of the LXX, the passage may be translated thus:

Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hid themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle.

The passage relates the joining of two different groups to the side of the victor in the Battle of Michmash: the Hebrews who served in the Philistine camp and the Israelites who hid themselves in Mount Ephraim (cf. 1 Sam. 13: 6). The narrator precisely defined the two groups, making it clear that the difference was not merely literary.

In the other six references, the name "Hebrews" is used by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4: 6, 9; 13: 3,<sup>35</sup> 19; 14: 11; 29: 3). One may assume that by using this term, the narrator intentionally emphasized the Philistines' scorn of the uprooted elements who were in their service and who were apparently considered an inferior group. However, in five out of six references, the degrading appellation is directed toward the Israelites, the rivals of the Philistines. The application of the term "Hebrews" to the Israelites requires some explanation; some background information about the activity of uprooted elements in the pre-monarchical and the early monarchical periods is necessary.

As was recognized long ago, the bands of Jeptah and David were socially identical with the Ḥabiru-bands of the second millennium B.C.<sup>36</sup> The appellation "Hebrews" is applied once to David and his band, who were scornfully defined as such by the Philistine lords (1 Sam. 29: 3). In fact, the best descriptions of bands within the entire literature of the ancient Near East appear in the biblical stories of Jeptah and David.

<sup>33</sup> The 1 Sam. 13: 7 passage was omitted from the discussion since it is obviously corrupt. See S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford, 1913), pp. 99 f.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Gray, "Ḥābirū-Hebrew Problem," pp. 180 f.; J. Weingreen, "Saul and the Habirū," *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 64 f.; Weippert, *Settlement*, p. 88; Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 422 f.

<sup>35</sup> The 1 Sam. 13: 3 passage is emended in accordance with the version of the LXX. See Driver, *Notes*, p. 98.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, G. Buccellati, "La 'carriera' di David e quella di Idrimi, re di Alalac," *Bibbia e Oriente* 4 (1962): 95–99; B. Mazar, "The Military Elite of King David," *VT* 13 (1963): 310–12; Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 133, 135 f.

They portray the background of the flight, the emergence of the bands, their methods of survival, and the manner in which they were re-integrated into Israelite society.

Jeptah was the son of a "harlot" and, as such, not entitled to an inheritance in his father's house; he was obliged to migrate to a marginal territory (the Land of Tob). Known as a "mighty warrior," he assembled a band of "worthless fellows," which he commanded. When the inhabitants of the Gilead region were oppressed by the Ammonites, Jeptah was called by his compatriots to lead, with his strong band, the armed forces of Gilead against the aggressors. As a result of his success in the battles against the Ammonites, he was able to acquire both wealth and authority in Gileadite society of the eleventh century B.C. (Judg. 11).

Even more instructive are the stories of David's rise to power. Serving first as a military commander under Saul, king of Israel, and married to the king's daughter, he was later obliged to flee from his father-in-law, who sought to kill him. "David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men." (1 Sam. 22: 1–2). In contrast to this description are the words of Nabal, David's enemy, who refused to give them supplies, calling them slaves "who are breaking away from their masters" and men "who come from I know not where" (1 Sam. 25: 10–11). By his authority and personal influence, David was able to attract not only his relatives, but also elements of a lower social status, men who had complaints against the incumbent régime as well as others seeking a new fortune, thus becoming the leader of a powerful, well organized military force. The band also included a priest (Abiathar, 1 Sam. 22: 20–23) and a prophet (Gad, 1 Sam. 22: 5). This reminds us of the story of Idrimi, who was not only the captain of his band but also its diviner.<sup>37</sup>

The narrator describes in great detail how David, leading his band, was able to escape pursuit of the king of Israel. He sought places of refuge in the inaccessible desert borderlands and in hidden caves. Of particular interest are the ways in which David was able to maintain and sustain his band. He demanded protection money from the wealthier landowners in his area, even threatening death when anyone refused to pay (1 Sam. 25). David also married women of southern Judean origin—Abigail of Carmel and Ahinoam of Jezreel (see Josh. 15: 55–56)—and was certainly supported by his fathers-in-law. Because of the dangers involved in wandering within Israelite territory, David later moved to Philistia, becoming a vassal of the Philistine king of Gath, Saul's main enemy. The band under David's command served as mercenaries in the Philistine camp, even in campaigns directed against their countrymen (1 Sam. 27: 1–6; 28: 1–2; 29). The king of Gath gave him Ziklag, and from there he systematically raided groups of pastoral nomads situated on the southern borders of Palestine (1 Sam. 27: 7–11). Because Ziklag was located in the vicinity of the land

<sup>37</sup> For the most recent treatment of the story of Idrimi, see M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, "Die Inschrift der Statue des Königs Idrimi von Alalah," *UF* 13 (1981): 201–69, with additional bibliography. A priest

of Ishhara is likewise mentioned among the Habiru-groups in a tablet from Alalah Level IV (AT 180:20); see Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, p. 133.

of Judah, David began to create political alliances by defending the settlements of southern Judah against the pastoral nomads of the desert, even sending them gifts from the spoil of their hated enemies (1 Sam. 30). It was only after the death of Saul that David's special position was recognized by the inhabitants of the land of Judah, who anointed him as their king in Hebron (2 Sam. 2: 1–4). His band became the nucleus of the growing army of the new kingdom.

The case of Abimelech, the son of Gideon, is different (Judg. 9). He started his career by hiring “worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him” (Judg. 9: 4) and thus came to power. However, he remained within the confines of his clan and tribe and never became a Ḥabiru. Using uprooted refugees to help him gain political power, Abimelech resembles the Canaanite city-state rulers who hired soldiers from among the Ḥabiru for similar reasons (see Judg. 11: 4–11).

Gaal and his “kinsmen,” on the other hand, were refugees, probably of Israelite origin, who assembled as a band and found shelter in the city of Shechem under the protection of the “lords” of Shechem (Judg. 9: 26–29). Later they were expelled from the town as a result of Abimelech's military pressure (vv. 30–41). This situation finds an exact parallel in the case of the band of Ḥabiru who stayed in the city of Tushulti under the patronage of its ruler (Amanḥatpi) until they were forced to leave after the attack by Tushulti's neighboring rulers (EA 185 and 186). In still another example, David and his band stayed in the city of Keilah under the patronage of the “lords” of the city until they heard of Saul's expected campaign against the city; they then were forced to escape (1 Sam. 23: 1–13).

Another instance of a leader of a band who subsequently seized the throne is Rezon, the son of Eliada (1 Kings 11: 23–24). Although the precise details are not known, the story is not unlike that of David and his rise to power in Israel. Rezon fled from his lord Hadadezer, king of Zoba, and became the leader of a marauding band. After the defeat of Hadadezer, Rezon gradually gained more and more power and finally became the king of Aram-Damascus during the reign of Solomon.

A literary depiction of a band is portrayed in Judg. 18. The plot has been correctly characterized as a “chronique scandaleuse” and is certainly a polemic against the sanctuary and cult of the city of Dan.<sup>38</sup> The migrating Danites are presented as a brigade of 600 armed men (Judg. 18: 11, 16, 17), exactly like the bands of David (1 Sam. 23: 13; 27: 2; 30: 9) and Rezon (1 Kings 11: 24). The mood of the Danites is characterized by the term *mry npš*, “angry fellows” (Judg. 18: 25), an expression which also describes the mood of the men who attached themselves to David after his flight from Saul (1 Sam. 22: 2). On their way northwards, the Danites took both the cult objects and the priest of Micah's temple by force and threatened to kill him if he tried to stop them. Finally, they made a surprise attack on the peaceful city of Laish, annihilated its population, and eventually settled there (cf. 1 Sam. 27: 8–11). The Danites' behavior is more brigandish than that of a pastoral clan and is an accurate literary reflection of the way of life of the bands of the pre-monarchical and early monarchical periods.

<sup>38</sup> M. Noth, “The Background of Judges 17–18,” *Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Mullenburg* (New York, 1962), pp. 68–77.

*The Rebellion of Sheba (2 Sam. 20)*

The revolt of Sheba ben Bichri follows in the "succession narrative" the rebellion of Absalom and is described as the direct outcome of the latter (2 Sam. 19: 41–44; 20: 1–2). The two stories form a coherent literary unit and should be discussed together. Some general introductory remarks on these two episodes are essential before we try to connect Sheba's rebellion with the subject at hand.<sup>39</sup>

Reading the stories about Absalom and Sheba's rebellions carefully (2 Sam. 15–20) and attempting to interpret them historically, one finds a remarkable discrepancy between the terminology used to indicate the rebellious elements and the actual participants in these revolts. Absalom was of the tribe of Judah. He was proclaimed king in Hebron, the central city of Judah, David's former capital. His commander-in-chief was Amasa, a Judean; and his advisor, Ahithophel of Giloh, was also Judahite. David was forced to abandon Jerusalem, his capital, in great haste and to cross the Jordan because of the advancing rebel army from Hebron. One can hardly doubt the initiative and the decisive role played by the tribe of Judah in the revolt. For this reason, the elders of Judah were afraid to contact David after the death of Absalom and the quelling of the rebellion (2 Sam. 19: 10–13). Yet, in contrast to all these concrete data, the rebels are consistently called "men of Israel," "all the men of Israel," and "all the elders of Israel." The "men of Judah" and the "elders of Judah" appear suddenly in the story at the start of the negotiations which follow the crushing of the revolt.

A similar inconsistency is also reflected in the story of Sheba's rebellion. The participants in the revolt are Sheba and his followers, who were obliged to find shelter in the far-off city of Abel of Beth-maacah. Moreover, there is no sign of the formation of a military organization of any kind on the rebel side; yet it is related that "all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri" (2 Sam. 20: 2).

These remarkable internal contradictions in the two stories, in my opinion, can be explained as the result of the bias of the Judean scribes who composed the stories.<sup>40</sup> The narrator was reluctant to blame his own tribe, which was also the king's tribe, for Absalom's rebellion. Therefore, he systematically used the all-inclusive designations "men of Israel" and "all the men of Israel" for the followers of Absalom, until reaching the point in the story when the tribe of Judah once again supported the king. Thereafter, he changed his terminology and called them by their real name, "men of Judah." Thus an analysis of only the terminology used cannot help us determine the chain of events.<sup>41</sup> I would propose that until Absalom's entrance into Jerusalem, only the tribe of Judah was involved in the rebellion. The main issue discussed in the

<sup>39</sup> For the rebellion of Sheba, see F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978), pp. 104–11, with bibliography; H. Tadmor, "Traditional Institutions and the Monarchy: Social and Political Tensions in the Time of David and Solomon," in T. Ishida, ed., *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 247–50.

<sup>40</sup> For other passages reflecting the bias of the

Judean scribes, see my article "The Inheritances of the Cis-Jordanian Tribes of Israel and the 'Land that yet Remaineth'," *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 156 f. (in Hebrew).

<sup>41</sup> See Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand*, pp. 94–104, with additional bibliography; note also F. Langlmet's reviews of Crüsemann in *RB* 87 (1980): pp. 420–24; Tadmor, "Traditional Institutions," pp. 239–49.

meeting between Absalom and his followers in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 17: 1–14) was whether to attack immediately, backed only by the tribe of Judah, or whether to broaden their base of support. It was only after the acceptance of Hushai's advice that the other Israelite tribes became involved in the rebellion and, at least partially, participated on the side of the rebels.

The same explanation, namely, the bias of the Judean scribe, also applies to the description of Sheba's revolt. In order to further blur the earlier anti-Davidic position of the tribe of Judah, the narrator intentionally magnified the importance of this second revolt, transforming it into an all-northern Israelite tribal act against David. He thus wanted his readers to infer that two general insurrections occurred at that time: one all-Israelite headed by Absalom and a second northern Israelite headed by Sheba. In fact, there were two rebellions: one mainly Judahite headed by Absalom and a second, local one, headed by Sheba.

Sheba's revolt started at an inopportune time for David, immediately after the quelling of Absalom's rebellion, when he began to show his preference for Judah during the incident of the crossing of the Jordan (2 Sam. 19: 12–16, 41–44). Sheba was trying to take advantage of the dissatisfaction among the northern tribes and incite a second rebellion. There is no indication, however, that he won them over, although the revolt caused much apprehension in David's camp (2 Sam. 20: 6).

What might have been the background of Sheba ben Bichri? We are told that he was of the tribe of Benjamin (2 Sam. 20: 1), probably of the Benjaminite clan of Becher (cf. 2 Sam. 16: 5, Shimei ben Gera),<sup>42</sup> and lived in Mount Ephraim (2 Sam. 20: 21) and that his followers are called *kl hbrym* (2 Sam. 20: 14). There is a marked inconsistency between Sheba's two designations—"a Benjaminite" and "of Mount Ephraim"—since the latter was located north of the tribal inheritance of Benjamin. All the places which are explicitly located in Mount Ephraim (Timnath-serah, Ramah, Bethel, Mount Zemaraim, Shechem, Shamir) are situated north of Benjamin's border. Furthermore, two districts within the Solomonic administrative division are called "Mount Ephraim" (1 Kings 4: 8) and "Benjamin" (1 Kings 4: 18), indicating the separation of the two territories. No single reference supports the idea that parts of Benjamin's inheritance were ever included in Mount Ephraim.<sup>43</sup> One

<sup>42</sup> Driver, *Notes*, p. 340.

<sup>43</sup> Z. Kallai ("Baal Shalisha and Ephraim," in B. Uffenheimer, ed., *Bible and Jewish History: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of J. Liver* [Tel Aviv, 1971], pp. 191–95 [in Hebrew]) suggested that Mount Ephraim was originally a general designation for the mountainous area north of Jerusalem which may have included the territory of Benjamin. He based his conclusion mainly on the sequence in 1 Sam. 9: 4–5 suggesting that the territories of Shalisha, Shaalim, Jemini (= Benjamin), and Zuph were all included in Mount Ephraim which headed the list of "lands." The geographical description of the search for the lost asses should, however, be explained differently. Saul started the search from his birthplace, either Gibeah or Gibeon. From Gibeah/Gibeon, he went northwards to Mount Ephraim; (b) continued eastwards to the land of

Shalisha; (c) proceeded southwards to the land of Shaalim; (d) passed westwards to the land of Jemini (= Benjamin); (e) went northwards to the land of Zuph, where the city of Ramah is situated (1 Sam. 1: 1). It is clear that the narrator has arranged the territories ("lands") in a deliberate geographical sequence, emphasizing that Saul, in the search for the lost asses, has made a vast circle around the city of Ramah before at last entering the city according to the divine plan. One may further note that all sources in which Mount Ephraim is mentioned were written only after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, thus reflecting the territorial concepts common at that time. All biblical references to Mount Ephraim indicate that the northern boundary of Benjamin's inheritance marks its southern border. Whether the term "Mount Ephraim" was originally associated with other areas cannot be established.

might even propose that the name Benjamin ("son of the south") for the southern tribe of the House of Joseph was given on account of its position south of Mount Ephraim, the seat of the tribe of Ephraim and part of the tribe of Manasseh.<sup>44</sup> How can we account for the fact that the rebel lived outside of the territory of his tribal inheritance?

Mount Ephraim, where Sheba lived, especially its western slopes, was a common hiding place for runaway peoples. This is evident from the description in 1 Sam. 13–14, where those escaping the Philistine's attack hid themselves in Mount Ephraim (1 Sam. 14: 22; cf. 13: 6). Certain parts of Mount Ephraim are explicitly called "Se<sup>c</sup>irah," i.e., a wooded ("shaggy") area, in the story of Ehud's escape from the Moabites (Judg. 3: 26–27; see also Josh. 15: 10).<sup>45</sup> Assuming that Saul was of the clan of Becher (1 Sam. 9: 1, Bechorath probably represents Becher),<sup>46</sup> one may infer that Sheba, who was kin to the house of Saul, was persecuted by David and was thus obliged to leave his family and tribe to seek refuge in this mountainous area.

The followers of Sheba are called *kl hbrym* in the MT version, and various suggestions have been offered to explain this enigmatic name.<sup>47</sup> Taking into account the variant *kl h<sup>c</sup>rym* in several manuscripts (LXX and S), one may suggest the reading *kl h<sup>c</sup>brym*. Thus, 2 Sam. 20: 14 could be translated as follows: "And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah; and all the 'Hebrews' assembled and followed him in." The term "Hebrews" fits nicely into the historical context of the episode, and one can easily explain how it became corrupt at a later date due to a misunderstanding.

With this in mind, we may reconstruct the chain of events. Sheba was a refugee who stayed with his band of "Hebrews" in the inaccessible area of Mount Ephraim. At a moment of political crisis following Absalom's rebellion, he tried to take advantage of the situation by inciting a revolt. The moment selected for the revolt was not unlike those occasions on which Jeptah, David, and Rezon rose to power. It is for this reason that David, who was personally acquainted with the dangers involved in this kind of situation, was so anxious to put an immediate end to the rebellion (2 Sam. 20: 4–6). Sheba, however, unable to gain support from the northern tribes, was obliged to flee with his band of "Hebrews" and sought refuge at Abel of Beth-maacah, probably part of the Danite enclave in Upper Galilee (1 Kings 15: 20; cf. the LXX version of 2 Sam. 20: 18). The rebel hoped to find shelter there, depending on the close relations between the Danites, who had emigrated from the Shephelah northwards (Josh. 19: 47;

<sup>44</sup> For the northern border of Mount Ephraim, see my article "The District-System of Israel in the Time of the United Monarchy," *Zion* 48 (1983): 8–12 (in Hebrew).

<sup>45</sup> See M. C. Astour, "Place Names," in L. R. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 2, *Analecta Orientalia* 50 (Rome, 1975), pp. 331 f., 365; J. A. Soggin, *Judges, A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 52. In light of Josh. 15: 10 and Judg. 3: 26, one may also clarify the problems involved with the mention of *mātāti še'eri* in an Amarna letter from Jerusalem (EA 288:26). The toponym can hardly refer to the region of Seir (Edom), located far away, southeast of the area of Jerusalem. Seir (*še'eri*) is probably a descriptive

designation for the wooded mountainous areas where the bands of Ḥabiru, 'Abdi-Ḥeba's enemies, found shelter. The passage in EA 288: 26–28 may be translated thus: "Unto the wooded ('shaggy') areas (and) unto Gath-carmel all the city-state rulers are at peace, but there is a war against me."

<sup>46</sup> J. Marquart, *Fundamente israelitischer und jüdischer Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1896), p. 14; S. A. Cook, "Notes on the Composition of 2 Samuel," *AJSL* 16 (1899–1900): p. 166, n. 46; A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 171, n. 28.

<sup>47</sup> For the various proposals offered by scholars for 2 Sam. 20: 14, see Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand*, p. 110, n. 25, with further bibliography.

Judg. 18), and the Benjaminites, their former neighbors. Sheba's hopes for asylum were in vain: he was betrayed and killed after a short siege (cf. the episode in 1 Sam. 23: 1–13). Rowton noted that "history has doubtless forgotten far more parasocial leaders than those who did leave a mark in the chronicles or in local tradition. For usually only those are remembered who met success."<sup>48</sup> Sheba is an exception; he is remembered because of the role the episode played in the author's deliberate presentation of the history of David.

*The Transfer of the Term "Hebrews" to the Sphere of Literature*

With their status as uprooted people living on the margins of society, the bands described in the books of Judges and Samuel are identical to the Ḥabiru of the ancient Near Eastern texts. The term "Ḥabiru," however, is an appellation which has exclusively social connotations, whereas the term "Hebrews" has both social and ethnic connotations and is used as a gentilic only for the Israelites. How, then, did the social appellation Ḥabiru become a "social ethnonym"<sup>49</sup> in the biblical tradition, and why was it applied in these stories to the Israelites?

As was demonstrated above, the "Hebrews" originated from among Israelite tribal society just as all other Ḥabiru-people originated from the neighboring Western Asiatic societies of the second millennium B.C. Moreover, in certain historical moments, such as the struggles with the Ammonites or the Philistines, groups of "Hebrews" cooperated with their compatriots and were subsequently re-integrated into Israelite society. Thus, there was a kind of ethnic connection between the Israelites and the Hebrews in the sense that the latter were part of Israelite tribal society both at the beginning and the end of their history. Even David, who established the kingdom and founded the capital city and royal dynasty of Israel, was a "Hebrew." It is no wonder that the social appellation acquired an ethnic meaning and that the refugees of Israelite origin were called "Hebrews." Thinking of this specific usage for the term "Hebrew," the author of the stories of 1 Samuel used a subtle literary device: in the description of the Philistine scorn for the Israelite uprisings, the Philistines mockingly call their enemies "Hebrew," the term for the marginal groups who had come to their aid and thus we see the beginning of the literary process which would culminate with a considerable difference in meaning between the terms "Ḥabiru" and "Hebrew." This narrator, however, certainly knew the difference between the designations "Israelite" and "Hebrew": it is only the Philistines who would use this degrading name to denigrate their rivals, the Israelites. Nowhere does the narrator use the term "Hebrews" as a gentilic for the Israelite tribes.

As shown above, the scribes of the Amarna letters used the appellation "Ḥabiru" in a similar way—as both a derogatory term indicating scorn and as a label for all real or ostensible rebels against the Egyptians and their allies among the city-state rulers of Canaan.<sup>50</sup> By the way, the scribes of the books of Judges and Samuel—when

<sup>48</sup> Rowton, "Parasocial Elements," p. 193.

<sup>49</sup> For the term "social ethnonym," idem, "ḤApiru-ḤIbrim," p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Weippert (*Settlement*, pp. 87 f.) has correctly noted the resemblance between the description of the

Israelites, who resisted the Philistine claim to supremacy, as "Hebrews" and the analogous use of the term "Ḥabiru" in the Amarna letters. Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 421 f.



describing the Israelite scorn for their rivals, the Philistines—also had them derisively call their enemies by the humiliating name *ʿarēlīm*, “uncircumcised” (Judg. 14: 3; 15: 18; 1 Sam. 14: 6; 17: 26, 36; 31: 4; 2 Sam. 1: 20).

When the term “Ḥabiru” vanished from the Western Asiatic historical arena, partly because of the foundation of “national states” in the region of the western Euphrates at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. and partly because it was replaced by another term,<sup>51</sup> the appellation “Hebrew” continued to be used in Biblical Hebrew. When examining the remaining biblical references in which the designation “Hebrew” is used, one recognizes two distinct features characterizing the original social position of the Ḥabiru: (1) their status as aliens who have migrated to places far from their homeland, and (2) their low social status as enslaved and exploited workers. At least one of these characteristics is prominent in all descriptions of the Hebrews in the Bible, particularly in the stories of the migration to Egypt and their sojourn there. These features alone, however, differentiate those Hebrews from the Israelites. It is clear that the appellation “Hebrew” has been transformed in these traditions to designate Israelites in exceptional situations.

In order to illustrate this, I cite a few examples below:

1. “Hebrew” as a designation for Israelites migrating to a foreign country: Joseph, who was brought by force from Canaan to Egypt is called “a Hebrew” (Gen. 39: 14) and “a young Hebrew” (Gen. 41: 12). Regarding the Israelites’ staying in Egypt and frequently called “Hebrews” in the stories of Exodus, it is explicitly stated “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 23: 9). The prophet Jonah, when leaving his homeland and fleeing to a foreign country, calls himself “a Hebrew” (Jon. 1: 9). Also Abraham may have been called “the Hebrew” (Gen. 14: 13), since he was commanded by the Lord “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12: 1). The Gen. 14: 13 passage may, however, reflect the later postbiblical ethnic usage of the term meaning simply “Israelite” (see below).<sup>52</sup>
2. “Hebrew” as a designation for Israelites in a position of slavery: this usage is common in the stories of the book of Exodus where it is applied to Israelites who were enslaved and exploited by the Egyptians for hard labor. In addition, in biblical law the term “Hebrew slave” designates Israelites who were enslaved (Exod. 21: 2; Deut. 15: 12; Jer. 34: 9, 14).

It seems clear that all biblical references to the “Hebrews” reflect some traits borrowed from the image of the second millennium Ḥabiru. But one should not minimize the difference in the use of the two terms and the changes which the appellation “Ḥabiru” underwent in the tradition of the Old Testament. The distinct biblical term “Hebrew slave” may well illustrate this transformation. The situation of a “Hebrew slave” has been compared many times with that of the Ḥabiru-people in the

<sup>51</sup> The ethnic term “Sutean” probably evolved in the first millennium B.C. into a social ethnonym. See

Rowton, “*ʿApiru-ʿIbrīm*,” p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Weippert, *Settlement*, pp. 93–101.

contracts from Nuzi.<sup>53</sup> However, the latter were called “Ḥabiru” due to their status as migrants entering Nuzi from neighboring countries. The “Hebrew slave,” on the other hand, was designated as such because of his social status as an Israelite who was enslaved within his own society. The comparison clearly illustrates the development of the term “Hebrew” within the biblical tradition and the increasing difference which developed in the use of the terms “Ḥabiru” and “Hebrew.”

To what extent was the term “Hebrew” used in the colloquial language of the time of the First Temple? Analysis of daily language on the basis of literary sources—and the Bible is a literary source—is extremely problematic. However, from its occurrence in various parts of the Old Testament, it seems reasonably clear that the term “Hebrew” was mainly restricted to the literary tradition. It rarely appears in the prophetic books (Jer. 34: 9, 14; Jon. 1: 9) and only in the term “Hebrew slave” in biblical law, in both cases designating an individual. One may safely suggest that in the colloquial language the term always referred to individuals. The application of the term “Hebrews” to large groups of Israelites was probably confined exclusively to the literary sphere, possibly influenced by the stories in the books of Samuel. The transfer of the term “Hebrew” to the field of literature brought about, in my opinion, from its separation from the historical appellation “Ḥabiru,” the term “Hebrew” becoming an appellation unique to Biblical Hebrew.

The “literarization” of the term “Hebrew” in the tradition of the Old Testament further affected the late development of the name in the post-Old Testament period. As is well known, the designation “Hebrew” appears in noncanonical Jewish literature, Josephus, Philo, and the New Testament, where it becomes a synonym of the ethnicon “Israelite.”<sup>54</sup> The use of the term in these late periods depends entirely on the terminology of the Old Testament, reflecting the influence of biblical literary traditions on authors who could not have been aware of the complicated background and changes which occurred in the use of the term. Was the term applied indiscriminately to all Israelites because the destruction of the First Temple forced a large number of them into exile?

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Summing up, it seems that a change in the use of the term “Hebrew” in the tradition of the Old Testament and its separation from the appellation “Ḥabiru” occurred in two major steps. The first stage is evident in the books of Samuel, which were composed at a time when the phenomenon of migration was still common in the growing Israelite society. The appellation “Hebrew” was apparently used at this time as a social ethnonym, designating the uprooted Israelites who were obliged to leave their families and seek their fortunes elsewhere. On a literary level, it became a derogatory term for the Israelites, used by their main adversaries during that period, the Philistines.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 85–87, with earlier bibliography; Rowton, “‘Apiru-‘Ibrīm,” p. 19, with further bibliography in n. 28; Lemche, “The ‘Hebrew Slave,’” *VT* 25 (1975): 129–44.

<sup>54</sup> H. Parzen, “The Problem of the Ibrim (‘He-

brews’) in the Bible,” *AJSL* 49 (1932–33): 255–58; J. Lewy, “Origin and Signification of the Biblical Term ‘Hebrew,’” *HUCA* 28 (1957): 1; Gray, “Ḥābirū-Hebrew Problem,” pp. 188–93.

Later, when the phenomenon of the Ḥabiru/Hebrews entirely disappeared from daily reality, the term "Hebrew" was restricted, in the colloquial language, to individual Israelites who were either migrants or slaves. In the literary tradition, the term was further transformed and became a general designation for groups of Israelites who were outside their homeland, that is, living in oppression in foreign lands as slaves. This latter stage opened the way for the post-Old Testament use of the ethnon "Hebrew," in which all traces of the original meaning of the appellation disappeared, and the name simply became another term for the Israelites.

#### ADDENDUM

A recent book by O. Loretz (*Habiru-Hebräer: Eine soziolinguistische Studie über die Herkunft des Gentiliziums ʿibrî vom Appellativum ḥabiru*, BZAW 160 [Berlin and New York, 1984]) appeared after this article was accepted for publication. I have written a short critical review of this book which will be published in this journal some time in the future. After consulting this study with interest, however, I still stand by the interpretation offered above.

The analysis of the evolution of the ancient Near Eastern appellation *ḥupšu-ḥb/pṯ* into the biblical adjective *ḥāpšî* (ibid., pp. 252–63) is of particular interest. Loretz has demonstrated that all biblical references to *ḥāpšî* embody the concept of freedom from the bonds of slavery or debt servitude, a state typical of the *ḥupšu-ḥb/pṯ* social class. Only the sociological context was entirely changed. This constitutes a good analogy for the above-suggested development of the ethnon ʿibrî from the appellation Ḥabiru, in which all biblical references reflect some characteristics which were borrowed from the image of the social status of the Ḥabiru.