

CHAPTER I

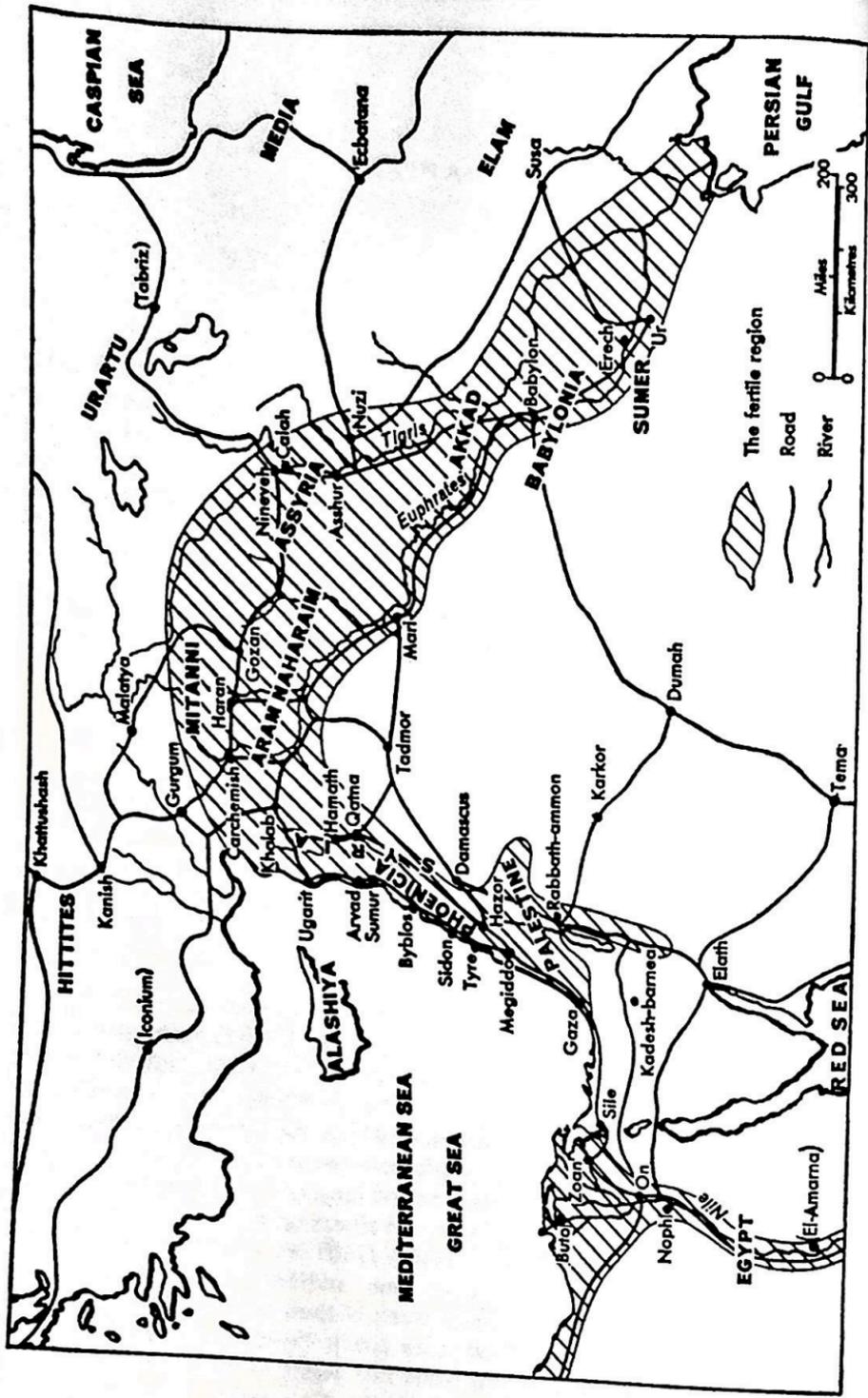
The General Setting

The history of any land and people is influenced to a considerable degree by their geographical environment. This includes not only the natural features such as climate, soil, topography, etc., but also the geopolitical relationships with neighbouring areas. This is especially true for Palestine, a small and relatively poor country, which derives its main importance from its unique centralized location at a juncture of continents and a crossroads for the nations.

1. The Bridge between Continents and Civilizations

The trend of Palestinian history has been determined in large measure by that country's place in the geopolitical and political framework of the ancient Near East.¹ As a geographical unit, about 350 miles in length, it extends from Sinai in the south to the Amanus and Taurus mountains in the north, while its width from the Mediterranean shore to the fringes of the inland desert averages only about 60 miles. This long, narrow strip beside the Mediterranean has the most exceptional climate and topographical structure in all the region. Only here does one find an appreciable rainfall during the winter months, which is increased by the high altitude of the mountain ranges that bisect the area longitudinally. In contrast to the barren desert which borders it on the east, the Levant comprises an important segment of that inhabitable region happily defined by Breasted as the "Fertile Crescent" (cf. map 1).

This crescent is hedged in on all sides by natural barriers: the sea on the west, arid wastelands in the centre and on the south, high mountains to the north and east. Its eastern and northern arm is known as Mesopotamia, the land of two rivers of which the northern segment was called Aram-naharaim after the settlement there of the Aramean tribes; the character of this region is determined largely by its two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. These two rivers originate in the highlands of Armenia and descend to the Persian Gulf. At the beginning of their courses they diverge widely from one another, the Tigris turning south-east and the Euphrates south-west; at their most widely separated points, when they are about 450 miles apart, the upper Euphrates is at the apex of the Fertile Crescent while the Tigris is on its eastern edge. However, near Aleppo in North Syria the Euphrates swerves sharply



The fertile region
 Road
 River

0 100 200 300
 Miles
 Kilometers

around to the south-east and continues to approach the Tigris until the two rivers are only about 20 miles apart at Baghdad, just slightly north of the site of ancient Babylon. Today the two rivers unite at a point 180 miles north of the Persian Gulf, which marks the south-eastern limit of the Fertile Crescent. In antiquity the Gulf extended somewhat farther north, and the two rivers poured into it at separate points. Ur of the Chaldees in that region and Nişşana (el- 'Auja) in the south of Palestine are located at the same latitude (30° 50').

Palestine comprises the south-western arm of the Fertile Crescent and is the poorest and smallest of all of its countries. Its main geopolitical importance lies in its role as a passageway to the second great centre of ancient civilization, Egypt, the land of the Nile. The strip of desert separating Palestine from Egypt is about 120 miles in length, but it served not only as a partition but also as a corridor between Egypt and the lands of the Fertile Crescent. It constitutes the only land bridge between the two continents of Asia and Africa.

Towards the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third millennia B.C. the foundations of human civilization were laid in the two lands of the great rivers, Mesopotamia and Egypt. These two regions saw the rise of the first mighty kingdoms which succeeded in imposing an organized and unified government over their respective populations, and in various periods even spread their authority to areas beyond their natural borders. The birth of these two civilizations was aided by similar economic and geographical factors in their respective regions. Each contained broad expanses, the fruitfulness of which depended upon the great rivers passing through them. The river is the main force for integration and unification in these lands; it is a convenient and inexpensive artery for transportation and irrigation, which stimulated the local populations to take advantage of its blessings. However, this required well-organized manpower to carry out extensive building projects such as canals and dams.

Factors such as these do not exist in Palestine and Syria where the geographical features tend to separate the land into smaller districts and serve as serious stumbling blocks to unification. Not one but three rivers flow across it lengthwise: the Orontes going north, the Litani and the Jordan whose streams run southward. Of course these river valleys are conducive to the development of urban settlements. Such was the case in the 'Amuq Plain (Antiochia) in northern Syria, the Lebabese Beqa' between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges, as well as certain areas in the Jordan rift, such as the valleys of the Yarmuk and Beth-shean and the plains of Succoth and Jericho. The excavations at Jericho have, in fact, demonstrated that one of the most ancient urban settlements in the Middle East was founded there, dating back to the Neolithic period, apparently in the eighth millennium B.C., at the dawn of human

civilization in this part of the world.

These characteristics are brought to mind when one reads the description of the Jordan Valley in the patriarchal narratives: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (Gen. 13. 10). Evidently the circumstances here were quite favourable to human occupation and the establishment of a permanent agricultural settlement. But the possibilities for irrigation and the areas available for settlement were limited, and external factors to encourage extensive political unification were absent.

Thus Palestine and Syria became a middle ground between Mesopotamia and Egypt from both the economic and the political point of view. The mighty kingdoms on both sides of the Fertile Crescent considered this strip of land a thoroughfare; and both of them laboured to impose their authority over it, mainly so as to control the trade routes passing through it and to use it as a bridgehead for defence or offence. The position of Palestine as a land bridge between the great world powers surrounding it has made an indelible impression upon its history. For long periods it was subjugated to foreign rulers. Cultural influences from both the north and the south met here, being carried by the many peoples who traversed its length. This made it very difficult for any kind of independent economic and political development, but it also gave access to all the accomplishments of ancient civilization. In this melting pot of cultural contact some of the greatest human cultural achievements came into being, e.g. alphabetic writing and monotheistic faith.

2. *The Table of Nations*

The geopolitical situation of Palestine as a meeting place between continents and civilizations was indelibly impressed on the minds of the ancients and received its clearest expression in the biblical "Table of Nations" (Gen. 10; 1 Chron. 1. 1-23).² This roster is a brief survey of the lands and peoples within the horizon of Israelite knowledge during the biblical period. It takes the form of a genealogical tree in which all the peoples of the world are related to one ancestor, Noah. The order generally followed is political and territorial; besides tongue and race the homeland of each people is defined in terms of its geographical position and political dependence (cf. map. 1).

All of the human family is divided into three main groups, which surrounded Palestine: the sons of *Shem* to the east, the sons of *Ham* to the south and the sons of *Japheth* to the north and west. Shem included the Semitic-speaking peoples to whom the Israelites felt themselves most intimately affiliated; the ancient traditions emphasize the association between ethnic and linguistic relationships. However, Canaan was related to Ham, despite its Semitic and Hebrew-like language, obviously

because of its long political association with Egypt. Japheth was the least affiliated with Palestine; to him belong the northern, mainly Indo-European-speaking peoples, including the Greek and Pre-Greek inhabitants of the Mediterranean.

The survey begins with the most distant and concludes with the nearest. First comes the genealogy of the sons of *Japheth*: Madai on the east, Ashkenaz and Gomer in the north and Tiras (the Etruscans?) and Tarshish in the west. The sons of Japheth include Anatolia (Togarmah, Tubal, Meshech), Javan (Greece) from Asia Minor to the land of Greece itself, and the islands of the sea from Elishah (Cyprus; Alashia in cuneiform sources). Rodanim (according to 1 Chron. 1. 7 instead of Dodanim; Rhodes), Kittim (Caphtor and the other islands), including Tarshish (Sardinia ?), which are subsumed under the expression "islands of the peoples" (MT as against RSV; Gen. 10. 5).

The second group contains the sons of *Ham* who come from the Egyptian political sphere, viz. Cush in the south (Nubia), Egypt itself, Put on the west (Lybia) and Canaan in the north. The sons of Cush include some of the lands in South Arabia which have affinities with Africa, viz. Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sheba and Dedan. Some of these peoples also appear in the list as sons of Shem.

It is extremely difficult to identify the various peoples associated with Egypt, but the last of these can be easily understood if one accepts the following emendation: "and the Caphtorim from whence came the Philistines". Even the Philistines who dwelt in the southern coastal region of Palestine were reckoned as the sons of Egypt, in spite of the fact that they came from Caphtor (Crete), one of the "islands of the peoples" belonging to Japheth. To Canaan are related, besides the well-known peoples of Canaan (Heth, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites and the Hivites [Horites?]), the main cities of Phoenicia: Sidon, which also served as a general term for Phoenicia, including Tyre and Byblos, 'Arqat (the Arkites), Sin (the Sinites), Arvad and Sumur (the Zemarites). And finally Hamath on the Orontes is also reckoned with the sons of Canaan, although its occupants were Hittites.³

To the Hamites was also reckoned a group of major Mesopotamian cities, even though Asshur is also assigned to the sons of Shem. These cities appear here because of their connection with Nimrod, who is associated with Cush. The group includes Babel, Erech, Akkad and Calneh (as against RSV) in the land of Shinar (southern Mesopotamia), and Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah and Resen in the land of Assyria (northern Mesopotamia).

The third section of the Table of Nations concerns the sons of *Shem*, "the father of all the children of Eber" (the Hebrews!) to which the Israelites are also related. As mentioned above, this group contains Semitic-speaking peoples whose languages are related to Hebrew,

except for Elam in the east and Lud in Asia Minor (Lydia ?). The Semites are divided into three groups: Asshur in Mesopotamia (here belong the Mesopotamian towns listed with the Hamites); Aram which extended from northern Mesopotamia to middle Syria and northern Transjordan; and finally the various tribes of South Arabia who are connected with Joktan the son of Eber and who are therefore, from this point of view, the closest relations to the Israelites. The best known of these tribes are Hazarmaveth, Sheba and Havilah, who have already been mentioned among the sons of Cush.

The composition of the list fits best the early phase of the Monarchy, especially the enumeration of the South Arabian countries.⁴ This date is indicated not only by its contents but also by its general outlook. On the one hand, we can hardly imagine that all these peoples could come within the purview of the tribes before their unification and active participation in the commerce and politics of the Middle East. On the other hand, the political affiliations of the nations which influenced their arrangement in the list still belong to the period of the conquest and settlement. The association of Canaan with Egypt preserves the memory of its status as an Egyptian province. The same is true with the Philistines, who are reckoned as sons of Egypt since they were allowed to settle in the southern coastal area which was a centre of Egyptian influence. The Hittites, however, are no longer reckoned as residents of Anatolia; the reference here is to the Neo-Hittite elements within the Canaanite sphere.

The Table of Nations reflects the ethnic and geographic world known to Israel during her apogee, and it gives a faithful sketch of Palestine's position among the peoples and kingdoms of the ancient Near East where the three spheres of Shem, Ham and Japheth intersected.

3. *Between Sea and Desert*

A factor no less important in the history of Palestine is its geographical position between the sea and the desert. The climate of Palestine is best defined as the outcome of the struggle between these two divergent powers.⁵ Palestine is located in a sub-tropical zone, having a rainy season in the winter and a dry season in the summer. The westerly winds bring the wet storms of winter and the refreshing summer breezes from the sea, while the easterly winds bring with them the dust and dryness of the desert, hot and burning in summer and cool but dry during the winter. The spring is early and short. The rainy season begins during October or November (sometimes as late as December), and a few weeks after its beginning a green carpet covers the hills and valleys, providing plentiful pasture for the flocks. During February and March everything blossoms, and thistles spring up taller than a man. Near the end of March the hot desert winds, called

“sirocco” or “khamsin” usually begin. These generally last from a few days to a week or more and are most common during April–May and September–October. With their beginning everything dries up rapidly and the blossoming landscape turns yellow and desolate almost overnight.

Not only the seasonal pattern but also the differing climate of the respective regions is an outcome of the contest between desert and sea. The amount of precipitation varies greatly in different parts of the country due to their geographical location and is intensified by the great differences in altitude.

Only a narrow strip along the Mediterranean coast enjoys any appreciable degree of rainfall, and the transition to arid desert country is quite sharp in the east and on the south. Therefore, the places receiving the largest amount of rainfall are the coastal strip and the northern highlands. To the degree that a particular region is lower, southerly, or removed from the sea its rainfall diminishes accordingly.

Since the precipitation is associated with climatic instability and barometric depressions which come and go during the winter, a great percentage of the rain falls during a limited number of days; likewise the difference may be very great from one year to another, and drought years are frequent. Deluge and drought do not balance out against one another, because on a rainy day the streams rise up and great currents of water overflowing from the hills suddenly flood into the plains; this may be followed by a series of warm days when the ground dries up rapidly under the hot rays of the sun, pouring down from a cloudless sky. Most of the streams are intermittent and contain water only on rainy days.

Perennial streams which flow toward the Jordan Valley are the Yarmuk, the Jabbok and some smaller tributaries on the east, and the Wadi Jalud on the west; the Arnon and the Zered empty into the Dead Sea. The Yarkon is the only river flowing to the Mediterranean; it runs its brief course from a rich and constant source at the foot of the ancient Aphek-Antipatris. The remaining streams, including the Kishon, carry water over short distances only and usually in small amounts.

The influence of the Mediterranean (the “Great Sea” in biblical terminology) on population and economy is not so pronounced in the history of Palestine as one might deduce from its long coastline. The main reason for this is the lack of convenient harbours and natural anchorages. The shoreline is almost straight, and in many places a high ridge rises up sharply from behind a narrow strip of beach which makes approach to the shore most difficult. Furthermore, a large percentage of the shoreline, especially in the south, is backed by a strip of shifting sands, often several miles in width, which also blocks the approach to the shore and deflects the highway from the coast inland so as to by-pass the sands. Therefore, most of the small anchorages were located in

antiquity at the mouths of streams, which gave some measure of protection to small boats and from which one could advance eastwards for some distance towards the mainland. In spite of the fact that there have always been harbours along the Palestinian coast, some of which enjoyed a certain measure of importance, e.g. Ashkelon, Joppa, Dor and Acco, maritime commerce remained limited during most periods. Thus the harbour towns did not serve to introduce much cultural influence from over the sea.

On the other hand, the coastline enjoyed special importance in the development of Syria. Along the Syro-Phoenician coast there are many excellent natural harbours, several on off-shore islands, e.g. Tyre and Arvad which were important bases for maritime activity. Therefore, sea trade was highly developed on the Canaanite-Phoenician coast from even the most ancient periods. Ships of Byblos were famous during the third and second millennia, and Canaanite Tyre and Sidon became the most important sea powers in the Mediterranean during the early centuries of the first millennium B.C.

The *desert*, on the other hand, which surrounds Palestine on the east and the south, exercised a much stronger influence on the country and its population. There are no natural barriers to protect the settled areas from nomadic tribes except for the desert expanses themselves. Of course, the desert population was quite sparse, so that there was plenty of room for the Bedouin to occupy extensive areas and to utilize them as pasturage, albeit poor, for their flocks and cattle. However, the mighty wastelands are a never-ending source for tribal migrations that exert constant pressure on the populated areas.

The conflict between the desert and the sown land is unceasing.⁶ The desert dwellers are always half starved, and thus they gaze longingly at the delights of the settled country. They take advantage of every opportunity to invade the sown lands, requiring the frontier dwellers to be constantly on their guard. In their respective periods the desert raiders—Amalekites, Midianites, Ishmaelites, *et al.*—were the Israelite farmers' most dangerous enemies in biblical times; one of the major accomplishments of Saul, the first King of Israel, was to relieve his people from the danger of these marauders (1 Sam. 14. 48). The line of Egyptian border forts in the eastern delta, the biblical Shur, was intended first and foremost to keep close watch over the movements of such Bedouin tribes.

Palestine possesses a long mutual boundary with the desert which provides plenty of opportunity for invasion and infiltration. Obviously this was more strongly felt in those districts adjacent to the desert, viz. the Negeb and central and southern Transjordan.⁷ These areas, which are wide open to incursions from the desert, suffered long periods of domination by the nomads with their flocks, which prevented any form

of permanent settlement.

But enmity and strife were not the only relations that could prevail between the nomads and the sedentary population. Transactions were sometimes carried out concerning trade and the use of seasonal pasturage during the summer months when the desert oases do not suffice. Penetration by Bedouin with their flocks, especially in the regions of Gilead, the highlands of western Palestine, the Negeb and the delta region of Egypt, was a frequent phenomenon in all periods, often permitted by the masters of the land who allowed the nomads to pasture their flocks in forested or swampy regions and even in their own stubble fields after the harvest.

The continual pressure by Semitic nomads from the desert so influenced the composition of the populace in Palestine that it remained predominantly Semitic, in spite of several invasions by other peoples from the north. The large majority of geographical names in Palestine is Semitic. This is clear evidence concerning the early residents who founded these settlements during the fourth and third millennia B.C., since the place names usually withstand even the passage of time and the replacement of whole populations by invasion and migration. The historical sources record at least two tremendous Semitic waves that inundated Palestine and the other lands of the Fertile Crescent in the biblical period: the Amorite wave at the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennia B.C. and the Hebrew-Aramean wave in the last centuries of the second millennium. The Arab-Islamic invasions must be viewed as the latest wave of this ethnic migration from the desert into the sown land of the Fertile Crescent.

4. *The Geological Foundations*

The sea and the desert are also the basic forces which created the rock of Palestine and its soil.⁸ Most of its rock consists of various limestones, formed as sedimentary deposits of the sea during relatively late geological periods: the Cenomanian, Turonian and Senonian, which are the last phases of the Secondary era, and the Eocene, which starts the Tertiary era.

The composition of the karstic limestone permits a rapid seepage of water which is absorbed to great depths until it reaches a solid, non-porous stratum of rock where it is then forced to flow horizontally. Only a part of this water breaks through to the surface in springs, which are especially prevalent in the geological rifts forming the valleys. This phenomenon increased the dryness in antiquity, because only during modern times have the really deep waters been exploited by pumping.

The Cenomanian, Turonian and the younger Eocene form hard rocks, capable of withstanding erosion. They are quarried into excellent building stones, one of the natural resources of Palestine; and they

weather into a fertile red-brown soil, the famous *terra rossa* of the Mediterranean sphere. Fortunately, they comprise the main part of the west-Palestinian hill country and of central Transjordan, which owe to them their richness and fertility. The intermediate Senonian rock, on the other hand, has completely different qualities. It forms a soft chalk which is easily eroded into a light grey, infertile soil. It is very porous, dries quickly, and is poor for agriculture. The Judean Desert above the western shore of the Dead Sea consists mainly of this Senonian chalk, and its qualities combined with the influence of the steep eastern descent transformed this area into a complete desert. However, Senonian valleys are the most suitable for traffic, as the soft rock quickly develops a smooth surface, undisturbed by boulders, usually dry even during the winter. The Senonian strips exposed at the base of the hills became therefore the most important thoroughfares through the hill regions, cf. especially the roads from the Sharon to the Jezreel Valley like the famous Megiddo pass or the Darb el-Hawarnah which crosses Lower Galilee (*infra*, pp. 50 f., 60).

The valleys of western Palestine are covered with a deep alluvial soil, washed down from the hilly regions. The largest and most important are the coastal plain and the Jezreel Valley (usually referred to as "The Valley"), which are the richest agricultural areas of the country. The western part of the coastal region is mostly covered with sand brought in by the sea, which extends inland over a strip of three to four miles or more. These are comprised partly of hard sandstone layers (called *kurkar*) and partly of shifting sand dunes, which threaten to cover more and more of the cultivated area. In the western Negeb, where they encountered no resistance, they penetrated inland up to a distance of 30 miles and more. The central part of the Sharon is covered by a special red sand as a result of weathering by later geological deposits in the area. Though it has now become the soil *par excellence* for citrus cultivation through irrigation and fertilization, it was virtually useless for agriculture in antiquity and for the most part remained forested until recent times. The major part of the northern Negeb is covered by layers of *loess*, a very fine yellow-brown dust carried by the desert winds. If adequately cultivated and watered it is a rich and fertile soil (cf. e.g. Gen. 26. 12). However, with the first rain it develops a hard crust, rather impermeable to water, across which the rains glide as if on oil. This factor increases considerably the danger of flash floods during the winter downpours to further aggravate the dryness of this semi-arid area. On the other hand, it facilitates the direction and collection of run-off water.

Large parts of southern Transjordan and the environs of the River Jabbok in central Transjordan are covered by a thick layer of red sandstone, deposited during long periods of early desert conditions. Its

orange to dark red colour gave the name to the huge, steep mountains of Edom (which means *red* in Hebrew). It is a hard sandstone, resistant to erosion and to the penetration of water, which has brought about the formation of the beautiful cliffs of Edom and Moab and the abundance of vegetation and water in areas of sufficient rainfall. This so-called Nubian sandstone contains the copper deposits of the Arabah. Only in the southern portions of the Arabah does one find protrusions of more ancient granites, not covered by later strata, whose wild spikes remind one of the huge granite mountains in the southern Sinai Desert.

The later phases of the Tertiary, the Miocene, the Pliocene and especially the Pleistocene eras left considerable traces of volcanic eruptions, mainly in northern Palestine. Particularly in northern Trans-jordan (Bashan) and in the eastern portions of Lower Galilee does one find areas of volcanic rock created by the action of extinct volcanoes. These cone-shaped hills still dominate the landscape of Bashan, and famous representatives of their kind in Lower Galilee are the Hill of Moreh and the Horns of Ḥaṭṭīn (Qarn Hattin). The basalt rock weathers into a rich grey-black soil, to which Bashan owes its proverbial fertility (Amos 4. 1; Psalms 22. 12, etc.). In various areas, however, unweathered basalt boulders remain which are a serious obstacle to traffic and agriculture. This is true for the steep eastern slopes of Lower Galilee and for the mountainous eastern reaches of Bashan, Hauran or Jebel Druze. Its north-western, lower portion, el-Leja, is a desertlike area of basalt boulders.

These periods of volcanic eruptions also saw the main tectonic activity which shaped the topography of Palestine. Mountains were pushed up, and deep crevices sank between them. The largest and deepest of these rifts is the Jordan Valley, which is only one segment of a great rift running from the Lebanese Beqa' to the Red Sea and on into Africa. Its sinking continued during the Pleistocene period when the most ancient race of man, the "Pebble Culture", was already inhabiting part of it.⁹ The area of the deep rift is sensitive to tectonic activity to this very day, as evidenced by the numerous hot springs and by frequent earthquakes.

5. *The Pastoral-Agrarian Economy*

The economy of Palestine is largely determined by natural geographic features: (1) its narrow dimensions; (2) its varied topography; and (3) its position as a land bridge between the great cultural centres.

Agriculture was the basis for the economy of most countries in antiquity including Palestine. Not only villagers but many "city dwellers" made their livelihood from agriculture, and farmers were the majority and the backbone of the population.

Palestinian agriculture was mainly natural farming without irrigation.

In this there are both advantages and disadvantages. Egypt and appreciable portions of Mesopotamia are actually deserts whose fertility depends upon the exploitation of water from their respective rivers through human effort. By contrast, it is possible in Palestine to sow and to reap a good harvest like a gift from heaven coming down in the form of rain and dew. However, the rains are limited mostly to the winter season and are not always sufficient in all parts of the country. Furthermore, drought years are not infrequent when the rain is insufficient everywhere. Years of drought and famine run like a scarlet thread through the ancient history of Palestine. In such times it often happened that part of the population was compelled to seek refuge in Egypt which is supported by a permanent water supply from the Nile. Only in parts of the Jordan Valley, especially the eastern sectors, rich in wells and tributary streams, was there irrigation in ancient times. The fertile land and the warm climate permitted lucrative irrigational farming (Gen. 13. 10). Nevertheless, this called for organization and diligence; since the Jordan Valley was close to the frontier, it was open to frequent depredations by desert marauders, making it a desolate waste for many centuries.

The contrast between the natural farming conditions in Palestine and Egyptian irrigation is expressed quite clearly in the Bible:

For the land which you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet, like a garden of vegetables; but the land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (Deut. 11. 10-12).

Here the feeling finds expression that the land is dependent upon God throughout the whole year, as portrayed in the festivals which are related to the agricultural seasons. Its limited area and varied topography are also described ("a land of hills and valleys"), in contrast to the broad plains of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The main agricultural products are included in the description of the seven species for which the country was renowned:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey . . . (Deut. 8. 7-8).

The most important products of horticulture and aboriculture are singled out, the former mainly in the valleys and the latter in the hills. The honey is probably not from bees but from dates, a typical product of the

Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea area during antiquity, though not mentioned here specifically by name. A more concise expression of praise used frequently in the Bible is "a land flowing with milk and honey", referring to the produce of the two most important agricultural activities: milk—dairy farming, flocks and herbs; honey—the cultivation of trees. Cattle-raising was continued even after the Israelite tribes had settled down. It occupied an important place in the economy of various regions, especially Transjordan (Num. 32. 1 ; 1 Chron. 5. 9, *et al.*), the fringe of the desert, and the Negeb (1 Sam. 25. 2 ff ; 1 Chron. 4. 38-41; 2 Chron. 26. 10).

A description similar to this appears in one of the more ancient Egyptian documents, viz. the story of Sinuhe from the mid-twentieth century B.C. Sinuhe flees from Egypt and finds refuge in a land of Upper Retenu, a region on the border between the settled and the nomadic populations, perhaps in the Yarmuk Valley and on the slopes of Golan.¹⁰

It was a good land, named ¹⁻³⁻³ [Araru ?]. Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees. Barley was there, and emmer. There was no limit to any (kind of) cattle.

Sinuhe recounted the wealth which he left behind on his return to Egypt: "My serfs, all my cattle, my fruit, and every pleasant tree of mine."¹¹ The picture as seen through this Egyptian's eyes does not differ from that of the Bible, both of them stress the agricultural wealth of the land, cattle and fruit trees, i.e. "a land flowing with milk and honey".

The same situation is reflected by the list of David's officers in charge of the royal estates. They included supervisors

. . . over those who did the work of the field for tilling the soil . . . over the vineyards . . . over the produce of the vineyards for the wine cellars. . . . Over the olive and sycamore trees in the Shephelah . . . over the stores of oil. . . . Over the herds that pastured in Sharon . . . over the herds in the valleys,

and finally

. . . over the camels . . . over the she-asses . . . , [and] . . . over the flocks . . . (1 Chron. 27. 25-31).

Camels and she-asses are not directly related to agriculture but rather to the trade routes. Control over the main arteries of commerce in the Middle East, which passed through Palestine, assured that trade would be an important branch of the economy, especially in those sectors transversed by the roads. This commerce was partly in the hands of nomads and semi-nomads and partly a monopoly of the kings and rulers. Up until the end of the Bronze Age transport was mostly by asses. It

would seem that only towards the end of the second millennium B.C. was the camel domesticated in sufficient numbers so as to become the typical "ship of the desert".¹² Commercial caravans of nomads are even mentioned in the Patriarchal narratives ("a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt" [Gen. 37. 25]). This, like most other local data in the patriarchal narratives, cannot antedate the period of the Israelite conquest. We are also informed from the El Amarna letters about merchant caravans passing through Canaan (*EA*, 7.73; 8. 13; 52.37; 226. 15; 225.8). At the beginning of their period of settlement the Israelite tribes were cut off from most of the important commercial routes dominated by Canaanites and Philistines, but this situation changed with the conquest of the plains by David. Solomon's great wealth was based on his control of these important trade arteries (1 Kings 4. 21-34; 9. 15-18) including the *Via Maris* and the King's Highway, clear out to such distant centres as Tadmor and Tiphseh (1 Kings 4. 24; 9. 18; 2 Chron. 8. 4). The traffic in precious goods was a royal monopoly and the Bible stresses the great international trade connections of King Solomon's merchants as suppliers of war chariots from Egypt and horses from Kue in Cilicia (1 Kings 10. 28-9).¹³ Control over Elath was also quite important since it opened the trade routes to southern Arabia, Africa and even the Indian Ocean. The Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon (1 Kings 10. 1-13) and the dispatch of "ships of Tarshish" from Ezion-geber (1 Kings 10. 22, etc.) are connected with the development of this traffic which brought into the royal treasury gold, silver, precious stones, perfumes and other expensive luxury items.

After the division of the kingdom, Israel continued to control a certain section of the *Via Maris* and in some periods even parts of the King's Highway in Transjordan. Judah sought to maintain control over the Arabah, Edom and Elath, in particular during the reigns of Jehoshaphat and Uzziah (1 Kings 22. 29; 2 Kings 14. 22, etc.). It is no accident that meagre biblical citations from the chronicles of the kings of Judah and Israel include a disproportionately large amount of information about the fate of Elath, a place so important for the economy of Judah. Evidence for trade with South Arabia was found in the excavations at Ezion-geber (Tell el-Kheleifeh)¹⁴ and perhaps in a South Arabian seal that has turned up at Bethel.¹⁵

Besides transport commerce, in which Palestine enjoyed the role of intermediary between the adjacent lands, especially with regard to valuable luxury items, we also have information about imports and exports. In antiquity the country exported mainly its agricultural surpluses, e.g. grain, oil, wine and honey (1 Kings 5. 11; Ezek. 27. 17), and also perfume and medicinal balm (Gen. 37. 25; 43. 11; Ezek. 27. 17). The balm was extracted from certain trees in the forests of Gilead (Jer.

8. 22). Imports included luxury wares and garments from Egypt (Ezek. 27. 7), lumber and fish from Phoenicia (Neh. 13. 16), as well as the above-mentioned luxuries and perfumes from South Arabia. Evidence for imports of this type from Egypt appears as early as the El Amarna letters. In a message from Pharaoh to the King of Gezer he affirms the dispatch of silver, gold, garments, precious stones and ivory-inlaid chairs in exchange for a shipment of beautiful handmaidens from Gezer.¹⁶

Navigation never held a very important place in Palestine's economy, in spite of its long coast. The main reason for this was a lack of harbours suitable for anchorage, in addition to the strip of shifting sand dunes that prevented the main highways from approaching too near the shore. Quite the opposite is true on the Phoenician coast where harbour cities flourished such as Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Arvad, *et al.* Fishing in the Mediterranean and in the Sea of Galilee was doubtless practised in most periods, especially as the smaller fishing boats do not need a deep anchorage.¹⁷ However, the sources are extremely meagre and its extent and importance was probably limited.

Of course, there were some harbour towns established in Palestine taking advantage of small harbours or rocky coves. The most important of these were Acco, Dor, Joppa and Ashkelon. Between them, there were some additional anchorages, especially at the river mouths, providing a certain amount of protection to the small coastal boats used in antiquity. Among these minor seaports three are known from excavation: Tell Abu Huwam near the mouth of the Kishon,¹⁸ Tell Qasileh at the Yarkon estuary¹⁹ and Tel Mor (Tell Kheidar) at the mouth of Wadi Sukreir.²⁰

Not a great deal is known about sea trade in Palestinian ports during the Bronze Age. Tables recently found at Ugarit do bear witness to commercial relations with various towns on the Levantine coast, e.g. Arvad, Byblos, Tyre, Acco, Ashdod and Ashkelon. Some of the commodities imported to Ugarit include fish, milk, wool, fabrics and clothing.²¹ A more explicit testimony comes from the story of Wenamon dated to the beginning of the eleventh century B.C. It mentions that a fleet was stationed at Dor belonging to the Tjeker (Sekel), one of the Sea Peoples.²² It may be assumed that similar fleets of ships were also at the disposal of the other Philistine cities along the coast. However, Dor is the only one of the four main seaports mentioned above that passed into Israelite hands and must have served as a port for the kingdom of Israel. We do not have any detailed evidence on this point, but the prominence of Dor stands out in the list of Solomon's district commissioners where it appears as a special district and its commissioner is the king's son-in-law (1 Kings 4. 11). Acco was under Israelite control in David's reign (Josh. 19. 29; 2 Sam. 24. 7), but in

Solomon's day it was returned to Tyrian jurisdiction (1 Kings 9. 11). The hint about maritime activity on the part of Zebulun and Asher (Gen. 49. 13; Judg. 5. 17) apparently testifies to their penetration into the Plain of Acco, doubtless under the patronage of the Canaanite cities at first (cf. Judg. 1. 31-2). Ashkelon became one of the five Philistine capitals, and Joppa was also included in their territory, although we have no definite information about its lot. It is clear that Joppa itself remained outside the Israelite boundary (Josh. 19. 46), and it is interesting to note that in Sennacherib's time it was under the jurisdiction of Ashkelon rather than nearby Ashdod.²³ Perhaps it was because Ashkelon was the major Philistine sea power that it ruled over Joppa and its vicinity. It is also possible that we generally do not hear about conflicts between Ashkelon and Israel because the latter did not entertain maritime aspirations.²⁴ A list of annual tribute paid by Ashkelon to Assyria was found at Nimrud containing among other things an appreciable quantity of woven fabrics, coloured cloth and fish.²⁵ From this we deduce that, in addition to the fishing industry, the manufacture of woven goods and their dyes were important branches of Ashkelon's economy. The lumber for building the temple was transported by sea from Tyre to Joppa both in the days of Solomon and of Zerubbabel (1 Kings 5. 9; Ezra 3. 7). This may be a reference to the Yarkon estuary. Perhaps Israel required the services of Philistine sailors. Jonah the prophet set sail from Joppa in a ship of Tarshish (Jonah 1. 3). During the Persian period the various harbours of Palestine were handed over to Tyre and Sidon as bases for coastal shipping. From the inscription of Eshmunazer, King of Sidon, we learn that he received Dor and Joppa as grants from the Persian King.²⁶

King Solomon inaugurated shipping on the Gulf of Aqabah with the help of Phoenician sailors, and for this purpose he built Ezion-geber close to the Elath (1 Kings 9. 26; 2 Chron. 8. 17).²⁷ Jehoshaphat (and apparently Uzziah as well) followed his example (1 Kings 22. 49; 2 Kings 14. 22; 2 Chron. 20. 36; 26. 2). The only competitors to Israelite shipping on the Red Sea were the Egyptians, and it is possible that one of Shishak's objectives in his campaign after Solomon's death was to put an end to Israelite maritime activities on the Gulf of Aqabah.²⁸

Palestine is not rich in raw materials. Nevertheless, Scripture does connect a wealth of iron and copper with the country ("a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (Deut. 8. 9). A few iron mines have been discovered in Transjordan,²⁹ and the text may have meant to include the iron mines in the Lebanon region. Copper mines have been discovered in the Arabah between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah. We have no positive evidence for the utilization of salt from the Dead Sea. But perhaps we are entitled to see hints to this effect in the stories about pillars of salt in its vicinity as well as the settlement named "the City of Salt" located in that region (Josh. 16. 61),

apparently Khirbet Qumran.³⁰ From the el-Amarna tablets we hear about shipments of raw material for the manufacture of glass being sent to Egypt from Tyre (EA, 148), Lachish (EA, 331), Ashkelon (EA, 323) and elsewhere (EA, 327) in southern Canaan. The techniques of the glass industry seem to have developed in the Levant during the 15th century B.C.³¹

Some of the urban settlers must certainly have engaged in various crafts, but information on this subject is quite scanty. It would appear that most of the crafts were passed by inheritance from father to son, the professions remaining within the clan or guild. In the Bible we find occasional references to families of artisans, e.g. potters (1 Chron. 4. 23; cf. Jer. 18. 2), builders (1 Chron. 4. 14); weavers (*ibid.*, 4. 21) and scribes (*ibid.*, 2. 55). Several dyeing plants were discovered in the excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim. This seems to have been the main occupation of the local inhabitants there.³² Along the coast people were engaged in extracting valuable purple and violet dyes from various kinds of shellfish (*Murex*). That industry was a major source for the wealth of the Canaanites,³³ and for a time the tribe of Zebulun seems to have engaged in it (Deut. 33. 19).

With all this the economy of the country remained principally pastoral-agrarian during the biblical period: "He who tills his land will have plenty of bread . . ." (Prov. 12. 11).

¹ Cf. especially G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (London, 1894); F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine*, I (Paris, 1933); W. B. Fisher, *The Middle East* (London, 1950).

² Maisler (Mazar), *Untersuchungen*, pp. 74-76; A. Hermann, *Die Erdkarte der Bibel* (Braunschweig, 1931); G. Hölscher, *Drei Erdkarten* (Heidelberg, 1949); J. Simons, "The Table of Nations", *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, 10 (1954), pp. 155-84.

³ The absence of Byblos is most surprising, because it is difficult to assume for the roster a period of major decline of this important Phoenician city, which was most intimately connected with Egypt. May we perhaps see in the following word "border" (Hebrew *Gebul* which has the same consonantal spelling as *Gebal*) a corruption of its name, and amend the text in the following way: "And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite, and the Gebalite; and afterwards were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad from Sidon, and thou comest to Gerar, etc." I owe this suggestion to Prof. Mazar.

⁴ K. Elliger, *PJb*, 32 (1936), pp. 63 ff.; Albright, *SAC*, p. 191.

⁵ H. Klein, *ZDPV*, 27 (1914), pp. 217-49; 297-327; D. Aschbel, *Das Klima Palästinas* (Berlin, 1930); *idem*, *Ha-aqlim be-erets Yisrael u-shekhenoteha* (Tel Aviv, 1948) (Hebrew); D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (London, 1957), pp. 41-82.

⁶ A. Reifenberg, *The Struggle between the Desert and the Sown* (Jerusalem, 1954).

⁷ Cf. N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (New Haven, 1945).

⁸ G. S. Blake, *The Stratigraphy of Palestine and its Building Stones* (Jerusalem, 1935); L. Picard, *Structure and Evolution of Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1943); Baly, *op. cit.* (note 5) pp. 14-40.

⁹ M. Stekelis, *IEJ*, 10 (1960), p. 118.

¹⁰ *ANET*, p. 19; B. Mazar, *EI*, 3 (1954), p. 21 (Hebrew).

¹¹ *ANET*, p. 21.

¹² W. F. Albright, *SAC*, pp. 120 ff.; *idem*, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, 1942), pp. 132 f.; *BASOR*, 163 (1961), p. 38; R. Walz, *ZDMG*, 104 (1954), pp.

- 45-87; W. G. Lambert, *BASOR*, 160 (1960), pp. 42 f.
- ¹³ W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, 120 (1950), pp. 22-25; H. Tadmor, *IEJ*, 11 (1961), pp. 143-50.
- ¹⁴ N. Glueck, *BASOR*, 71 (1938), pp. 15-17.
- ¹⁵ G. W. van Beek and A. Jamme, *BASOR*, 151 (1958), pp. 9-16; 163 (1961), pp. 15-18; but cf. also Y. Yadin, *BASOR*, 196 (1969), pp. 37-45; G. W. van Beek and A. Jamme, *BASOR*, 199 (1970), pp. 59-65; J. L. Kelso, *ibid.*, p. 65; R. L. Cleveland, *BASOR*, 209 (1973), pp. 33-36.
- ¹⁶ *ANET*, p. 487 (*RA*, 31, pp. 125-36).
- ¹⁷ M. Nun, *Fishing and Fishes in the Bible and the Talmud* (Tel Aviv, 1964) (Hebrew).
- ¹⁸ R. W. Hamilton, *QDAP*, 4 (1934), pp. 1-69.
- ¹⁹ B. Maisler (Mazar), *IEJ*, 1 (1950-51), pp. 61-76, 125-40, 194-218.
- ²⁰ M. Dothan, *IEJ*, 9 (1959), pp. 271-72; 10 (1960), pp. 123-25.
- ²¹ C. F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica*, IV (Paris, 1962, p. 142; J. Nougayrol, *Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit*, VI (Paris, 1970), Nos. 79, 9, 16 and 156; A. F. Rainey, *Israel Oriental Studies*, 3 (1973), pp. 60-61.
- ²² *ANET*, p. 26.
- ²³ *ANET*, p. 287.
- ²⁴ H. Tadmor, *BIES*, 24 (1960), pp. 173-74 (Hebrew).
- ²⁵ B. Parker, *Iraq*, 23 (1961), p. 42.
- ²⁶ *ANET*², p. 505.
- ²⁷ N. Glueck, *BASOR*, 72 (1938), pp. 2-13.
- ²⁸ S. Yeivin, *JEA*, 48 (1962), pp. 75-80.
- ²⁹ K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen, 1937), Sp. 95-8.
- ³⁰ Noth, *Josua*, p. 72; F. M. Cross and J. T. Milik, *BASOR*, 142 (1956), p. 16.
- ³¹ A. L. Oppenheim, *JAOS*, 93 (1973), pp. 259-66.
- ³² W. F. Albright, "Tell Beit Mirsim III", *AASOR*, 21-2 (1943), §§36-40.
- ³³ Galling, *op. cit.* (note 29), Sp. 153; B. Maisler (Mazar), *BASOR*, 102 (1964), pp. 7 ff.

CHAPTER II

The Land of Many Contrasts

Palestine, in spite of its limited area, is divided into many smaller districts which differ radically from one another. Most of the Jordan Valley, including the Sea of Galilee, down to about 40 miles south of the Dead Sea is below sea level. Its depression culminates at the Dead Sea, the surface of which is 1,275 feet below sea level, the lowest point on earth. Due to this deep cleavage the country is divided longitudinally into four distinct geographical strips: the coastal plain, the central mountain range, the Jordan rift and the Transjordanian highlands.

The differences of altitude between these neighbouring regions is enormous. The mountains of western Palestine rise in several points to a height of more than 3,000 feet, i.e. in Upper Galilee, in the Hebron area and Mount Ramon in the Negeb. In most areas their height is not less than 1,500-2,000 feet. The mountain plateau of Transjordan is even higher than this. Its average level is 2,000-2,500 feet, and its peaks reach more than 3,000 feet at many points, exceeding 5,000 feet in Edom. The snow-capped heights of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, which achieve altitudes of 8,000-9,000 feet, are the towering summits of the whole Levant but are separated from one another by the steep descents of the deep cleft between them. Due to these extreme variations of altitude over small distances, combined with the fluctuations of climate between desert and sea, the main characteristic of Palestine is its mountainous and chopped up appearance. Though in itself quite small, it is divided into many tiny regions, each possessing its own peculiar geographical features.¹

Smaller fissures cut latitudinally across the country, especially in the north, and divide the principal longitudinal sections into their main subdivisions. The most prominent of these is the Jezreel Valley, separating Galilee from Mount Ephraim, which bisects the longitudinal barriers and thus comprises the most direct west-east passage through Palestine.

The four longitudinal zones of Palestine are subdivided, therefore, into the following subdivisions (cf. map 2):

I. THE COASTAL ZONE

This strip is narrow at the north but broadens considerably towards