

THE LEVITES, *RA-WO, ΛΑΟΣ / ΛΑΟΙ — A NEW PROPOSAL FOR LEXICAL AND HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP ¹

Different proposals for possible relationships between Mycenaean Greek and the languages of the Eastern Mediterranean have been advanced in the scholarly literature in recent years. For natural reasons, most attention has been given to the possible relations between Greek and Anatolian languages ². With these considerations in mind, the present essay aims to highlight the possible relations of Mycenaean Greek and Hebrew, as well as to propose a hypothesis that may provide an explanation for the question of modes of cultural transmission.

The questions of multilateral linguistic and cultural relationships in the Eastern Mediterranean during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age have been addressed in depth by scholars. In some cases, the Oriental origins of words and institutions are advocated ³, while in others the Aegean origins are proposed ⁴. There are cases where establishing the direction of cultural transmission, if there was any, may not be possible ⁵. There are cases, however, where the origin of the word/institution may be determined with a high degree of probability. What follows focuses only on possible borrowings from Mycenaean Greek into Hebrew.

¹ I would like to thank Barry Keane for improving the English of this article.

² See Z. SIMON, “Anatolian Influences on Greek”, *Change, Continuity, and Connectivity. North-Eastern Mediterranean at the Turn of the Bronze Age and in the Early Iron Age* (eds. Ł. NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ – M. WĘCOWSKI) (Philippika 118; Wiesbaden 2018) 376-418.

³ M.C. ASTOUR, “Greek Names in the Semitic World and Semitic Names in the Greek World”, *JNES* 23 (1964) 193-201; *Hellenosemitica. An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden 1965); M. WEST, *The East Face of Helicon. West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford 1999); R. ROSÓL, *Früheseemitische Lehnwörter im Griechischen* (Frankfurt am Main 2013); “Early Semitic Loanwords in Greek”, *Change, Continuity, and Connectivity. North-Eastern Mediterranean at the Turn of the Bronze Age and in the Early Iron Age* (eds. Ł. NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ – M. WĘCOWSKI) (Philippika 118; Wiesbaden 2018) 334-344.

⁴ C.H. GORDON, “Homer and the Bible. The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature”, *HUCA* 26 (1955) 43-108; W. BURKERT, “Lescha-Liškah. Sakrale Gastlichkeit zwischen Palästina und Griechenland”, *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament* (eds. B. JANOWSKI – K. KOCH – G. WILHELM) (OBO 129; Freiburg – Göttingen 1993) 19-38.

⁵ See J.P. BROWN, *Israel and Hellas* (BZAW 231, 276, 299; Leiden 1995-2001); M. FINKELBERG, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks. Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge 2006).

A number of cases of lexical borrowings from Mycenaean Greek into Hebrew have been indicated in previous scholarship. The origin of the term *wanax* in Mycenaean Greek is clear. The proper name Anak (עֲנַק), reported in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Numbers 13), may be easily understood as the transformation of the term *wanax* into a proper name⁶. The strong presence of the Greek term in the Mycenaean *milieu* and its incidental appearance in the Hebrew Bible as a proper name make the Greek origin the most plausible explanation of the *wanax*-Anak case.

A similar case can be made for the Mycenaean Greek term *da-po-ri-to-ju*, i.e. the predecessor of the Greek *labirynthos*, denoting “sanctuary” or “holy place”⁷. With some confidence we can affirm that this term originated in the Aegean culture. Francesco Aspesi was probably the first to advance the hypothesis that Mycenaean Greek *da-po-ri-to-ju* was adopted in Hebrew in the form of *debir* (דְּבִיר), meaning the “Holy of Holiness” in the temple (cf. 1 Kings 6–8)⁸.

The case of the word/name “Tamar” (תָּמָר) was also pointed out as being a possible borrowing in Hebrew from Mycenaean Greek, or one of the Anatolian languages⁹. It may have originated in Hittite/Luvian *dammara-* (“cultic priestess”), or Mycenaean Greek *damart-* (“[religious or civic] functionary”), and the name of the biblical figure Tamar might be interpreted as related to this word, and rooted in its meaning (cf. Genesis 38).

⁶ E.C.B. MACLAURIN, “Anak/’Avaξ”, *VT* 15 (1965) 468-474; M. DOTHAN, “Ethnicity and Archaeology: Some Observations on the Sea Peoples at Ashdod”, *Biblical Archaeology Today*. Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology. Jerusalem, June-July 1990 (Jerusalem 1993) 53-55; cf. T.G. PALAIMA, “Wanaks and Related Power Terms in Mycenaean and Later Greek”, *Ancient Greece*. From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer (eds. S. DEGER-JALKOTZY – I.S. LEMOS) (Edinburgh 2006) 53-71.

⁷ See J.H. HELLER, “A Labyrinth from Pylos?”, *AJA* 65 (1961) 57-62; M. GUIDI, “Greco ΛΑΒΥΡΙΝΘΟΣ: note di linguistica mediterranea”, *Minos* 25 (1990) 175-193; I. YAKUBOVICH, “Labyrinth for Tyrants”, *Studia Linguarum* 3 (2002) 93-116.

⁸ F. ASPESI, “Greco λαβύρινθος, ebraico d^ebîr”, *Bandhu*. Scritti in onore di Carlo Della Casa (eds. R. ARENA – M.P. BOLOGNA – M.L. MAYER MODENA – A. PASSI) (Alessandria 1997) 2:491-513; IDEM, “L’ape e illabirinto. Un possibile nesso lessicale in ebraico nel quadro del sostrato egeo-cananaico”, *XII Incontro Italiano di Linguistica Camito-semitica (Afroasiatica)* (ed. M. MORIGGI) (Rubbettino 2007) 127-138; IDEM, “A margine del sostrato linguistico ‘labirintico’ egeo-cananaico”, *Proceedings of the 13th Italian Meeting of Afro-Asiatic Linguistic*. Udine 2007 (eds. F.M. FALES – G.F. GRASSI) (Padova 2010) 33-38. The hypothesis was accepted by a number of scholars such as G. GARBINI, *Scrivere la storia d’Israele*. Vicende e memorie ebraiche (Brescia 2008) 77-78; see also D. ASTORI, “Rumanian Tabara and ‘Aegean-(pre)Philistine’ *t/d(a)br”, *Journal of Linguistic Studies* 3 (2010) 113-117; Ł. NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANŃ, *Goliath’s Legacy*. Philistines and Hebrews in Biblical Times (Philippika 83; Wiesbaden 2016) 183-184.

⁹ Y.L. ARBEITMAN, “Tamar’s Name or Is It? (Gen 38)”, *ZAW* 112 (2000) 341-355.

The list of possible loan-words from Greek into Hebrew may be further expanded with cases of lexemes from the Hebrew Bible for which a Greek etymology has been proposed: e.g. *pilegeš*, *liškah*, *mekerah*, *peten*, *lappid*, Achish, Goliath¹⁰. Most of them, however, do not have their attestation in Mycenaean Greek, which makes the historical evaluation of the adoption process of possible loan-words more hypothetical and speculative.

Much different in its nature is the status of the hypothesis linking the biblical name/tribe Dan (דָּן) with the term *Danaoi*¹¹. According to this reconstruction, the biblical term Dan is related to the name “Danuna” (*dnynw*), one of the names in the lists of the Sea Peoples, as well as to the population of the city of Adana — *dnnm*, as attested in the eighth-century BCE inscription from Karatepe¹². The Greek name *Danaoi* is abundantly attested in Greek literature of the archaic and classical periods, but it certainly stems from the Mycenaean period. It is attested — in the form *Tnj* — already in the fourteenth century BCE, in the Egyptian text dated to the reign of Amenhotep III¹³. In contrast to the abovementioned cases of the supposed borrowing of the terms from Mycenaean Greek into Hebrew, the case of Dan-*Danaoi* attests to different phenomena. It highlights the possible migration of the group of people from the Aegean to Levant. Interestingly enough, the migrating group managed to keep its name and perhaps even its identity.

When considering any of the abovementioned hypotheses, one should be open to the possibility that there must have existed adequate circumstances allowing for intercultural relations between Mycenaean Greece and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age and/or Early Iron Age. The nature of our sources makes a reconstruction of this process of intercultural exchange highly speculative. Despite this reservation, it would be difficult not to think about the Sea Peoples, and the turmoil of their migration, as being the possible context of these intercultural relationships. The Sea Peoples, and the Philistines in particular, may be pointed out as the natural intermediaries between Mycenaean Greece and Canaan at that time¹⁴.

¹⁰ NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ, *Goliath's Legacy*, 136, 190-192, 197-198, 224, 237-238, 245, 247-250.

¹¹ Y. YADIN, “‘And Dan, Why Did He Remain in Ships?’ (Judges 5,17)”, *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1 (1969) 9-23; reprinted in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. F.E. GREENSPAHN) (New York 1991) 294-310.

¹² NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ, *Goliath's Legacy*, 76-78.

¹³ E. CLINE, “Amenhotep III and the Aegean: A Reassessment of Egypto-Aegean Relations in the 14th Century B.C.”, *Orientalia* 56 (1987) 1-36; E. CLINE – S.M. STANNISH, “Sailing the Great Green Sea? Amenhotep III's ‘Aegean List’ from Kom el-Hetan, Once More”, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 3 (2011) 6-16.

¹⁴ Ł. NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ, “The Philistines in Jerusalem? The Use of Archaeological Data as the Ethnic Marker: the Case of the Philistines, Other ‘Sea Peoples’, and Judah”,

However, all attempts to explain historically the processes of borrowing loan-words are limited by the speculative aspects of the reasoning, based only on lexeme analysis. Without knowing when, and where, and who might have been responsible for this process, we will always have to accept a high degree of uncertainty. Scholars tend to explain the hypothetical conditions in which these intercultural relations occurred on two grounds: 1) the borrowings may have been due to the existence of the broad, common cultural *milieu* of the Eastern Mediterranean; or, 2) they may have resulted from the migration of the Sea Peoples, who might have brought intellectual values and their names from the Aegean to the Near East. The first explanation can neither be falsified nor verified. In the second case, there is still a high degree of approximation, as we do not know any specific details about the people responsible for conveying the words from one language to another. Investigating the Philistines¹⁵, the Danites¹⁶, or other Sea Peoples¹⁷ as the possible transmitters might be useful. Still, it is insufficient to reconstruct the plausible process of intercultural relationships that would have encouraged the acceptance of loan-words into the receptor language. It is not enough to identify two neighbours to reconstruct the contact-zone. This is particularly true in the case of the Mycenaean Greek words that may have been integrated into the Hebrew Bible.

Having all this in mind, any information that helps explain the process more accurately would be of particular value. Such a case is provided if we know the people responsible for intellectual transfer from the Greek-speaking to the Hebrew-speaking environment. And here I advance the hypothesis that such a role was played by the group named in the Hebrew Bible as the Levites. The Hebrew word *levi* (לֵוִי) — I would argue — forms a loan-word from the Mycenaean Greek **ra-wo*, as found in the term *lawagetas* (*ra-wa-ke-ta*)¹⁸. Hebrew *levi* (*l-w-y*) would be a pure equivalent of the Mycenaean Greek term **ra-wo* / **la-wo*, which in later Greek became the noun *λαός* / *λαοί*¹⁹.

SOMA 2012. *Identity and Connectivity*. Proceedings of the 16th Symposium on Mediterranean Archaeology, Florence, Italy, 1-3 March 2012 (eds. L. BOMBARDIERI – A. D'AGOSTINO – G. GUARDUCCI – V. ORSI – S. VALENTINI) (BAR–S2581; Oxford 2012) 89-96; IDEM, “The Philistines as Intermediaries between the Aegean and the Near East”, *The Bible and Hellenism. Greek Influence on Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (eds. Th.L. THOMPSON – Ph. WADENBAUM) (Durham 2014) 89-101; see also BURKERT, “Lescha-Liškah”; O. MARGALITH, *The Sea Peoples in the Bible* (Wiesbaden 1994); G. GARBINI, *I Filistei. Gli antagonisti di Israele* (Milano 1997).

¹⁵ GARBINI, *I Filistei*; NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ, “The Philistines as Intermediaries”.

¹⁶ YADIN, ““And Dan, Why Did He Remain in Ships?””.

¹⁷ MARGALITH, *The Sea Peoples*.

¹⁸ NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ, *Goliath's Legacy*, 83-87.

¹⁹ J. CHADWICK – L. BAUMBACH, “The Mycenaean Greek Vocabulary”, *Glotta* 41 (1963) 157-271, here 216-217; F. AURA JORRO – F.R. ADRASOS, *Diccionario Griego-Español, Diccionario Micénico*. 2 vols. (Madrid 1999) 2:230-231.

This new hypothesis would present a challenge to the long-standing etymology of the Hebrew word *levi* (לוי), which posited a relationship with the Hebrew root *lwh* (“to join”, “to be joined”) ²⁰, with its equivalent in the Aramaic root *lwy* (“to accompany”) ²¹. The relation between the name *lwy* and the Hebrew root *lwh* is suggested by the word-play in Num 18,2 (לוי [...] וילוי). Similarly, the case of the popular etymology expressed in Gen 29,34 (“Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘Now this time my husband will be joined [*lwh*] to me, because I have borne him three sons’; therefore, he was named Levi”) does not offer any basis for a real etymology. The suggestions linking the name Levi with the name of his mythical mother Leah (*l’h*) also present different forms of popular etymology. On the other hand, the suggested relation between the name Levi and the Minaean word *lau’ân* (“priest”) from the root *lw’* may not necessarily point to the origins of the biblical term but rather attest to the impact of biblical terminology on South-Arabian ²².

If one accepts the hypothesis that the Hebrew *lwy* originates in Greek Mycenaean **la-wo*, the construction should be understood as *lw-y*, analogously to other group names used in the Hebrew Bible such as *ht-y* (“Hittites”) and *’mr-y* (“Amorites”). In this case, there would be full phonetic agreement: *l-w*. Such an etymology (**la-wo* → **lew*) requires only the explanation of the vowel shift: *a* → *e*. However, this phonetic phenomenon is not unusual in Hebrew ²³. In the Hebrew Bible, the noun *Levi* often appears with the article *h-*, which may indicate it being understood as a common noun, not a proper name ²⁴, which in turn may even strengthen the hypothesis relating the name Levi to the Greek **la-wo* (“the people”).

The Greek word **ra-wo*, *λαός* / *λαοί* (“the people”, “armed men”) is well attested in the literature ²⁵. The usage of the Hebrew term *lewy* / Levites in the Hebrew Bible shares a high degree of semantic meaning corresponding to its supposed Greek prototype.

In the Bible, the Levites as a group are usually linked to the cultic sphere. There are, however, strong reasons to see this relationship as secondary. The so-called Blessing of Moses (Deut 33,8-11) states:

²⁰ BDB, 532-533; cf. *DCH*, 4:526-529.

²¹ *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (eds. J. HOFTIJZER – K. JONGELING) (Leiden 1995) 1:569.

²² I. CARDELLINI, *I “Leviti”, l’Esilio e il Tempio*. Nuovi elementi per una rielaborazione storica (Roma 2002) 28-32.

²³ E. LIPÍŃSKI, *Semitic Languages*. Outline of a Comparative Grammar (OLA 80; Leuven 1997) 190 [§21.6].

²⁴ BDB, 532.

²⁵ P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Histoire des mots (Paris 1999) 619-620; cf. É. BENVENISTE, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris 1969) 2:89-95.

And of Levi he said: Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your loyal one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you contended at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and others, “I regard them not”; he ignored his kin, and did not acknowledge his children. For they observed your word, and kept your covenant. They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt offerings on your altar. Bless, O LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands; crush the loins of his adversaries, of those that hate him, so that they do not rise again.

Undoubtedly this passage links Levites with the cult. However, the reference to the teaching of the Torah (vv. 9b-10) establishes that this is a later interpolation²⁶. The Levites in Deuteronomy 33 are referred to in a military context that describes the Levites’ military actions during the mythical Exodus (Exodus 32). The Levites are referred to as those military fighters executing Moses’ orders:

He said to them [Levites], “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor’”. The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand of the people fell on that day. (Exod 32,27-28)

The Levites constitute the guards of the Ark, and as such are soldiers par excellence: “But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the covenant, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the Israelites; and the Levites shall perform the guard duty of the tabernacle of the covenant” (Num 1,53). The term *šmr* (“to keep”, “to watch”, “to preserve”) used in this passage has a clear military context²⁷. Similar military aspects of the Levites may be seen also in Exod 17,1-7 and Num 20,1-13²⁸.

The military nature of the Levites (and the Simeonites) is also expressed in the text that has been called “Jacob’s Blessing”:

Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company — for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. (Gen 49,5-7)

Deut 33,11 — part of the blessing received by the Levites — taken alone, looks like a ritual blessing for soldiers and has very few cultic aspects

²⁶ Ch. BULTMANN, “Deuteronomy”, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. J. BARTON – J. MUDDIMAN) (Oxford 2001) 135-158, here 156.

²⁷ BDB, 1036-7.

²⁸ See Deut. 6,1; 9,22; 33,8; Pss 81,8; 95,8; 106,32.

in itself: “Bless, O LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands; crush the loins of his adversaries, of those that hate him, so that they do not rise again”.

The passage in Deut 33,8-11, quoted above, might suggest a foreign origin for the Levites ²⁹. Verse 9 (“who said of his father and others, ‘I regard them not’; he ignored his kin, and did not acknowledge his children”) is usually interpreted as referring to their cultic activities. The text openly states: “For they observed (*šmr*) your word, and kept (*nšr*) your covenant”. This text, in its current form, links the particular status of the Levites with their cultic duties. It is not impossible, however, to think about the possible memory of Levites as strangers. If such would be the case, the word *ger* (“alien”, “stranger”) ³⁰, used several times in Deuteronomy in connection with Levites, may underscore the real memory about this group: e.g., “Rejoice before the LORD your God — you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you — at the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (Deut 16,11). This passage refers to the tradition that the Levites did not dwell in any particular region, but inhabited certain cities.

At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. Therefore, Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; the LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God promised him. (Deut 10,8-9)

According to Num 35,1-8 and Josh 13,33; 21,1-42, the Levites did not possess any given territory, but would have dwelt in special towns ³¹. The existence of the so-called Levitical towns and the absence of any given territory inhabited by this Israelite “tribe” is usually explained as the result of the Levites’ professional cultic service. This explanation slavishly follows the biblical account about the Levitical cultic personnel in the pre-Exilic period. On the other hand, it may be much more straightforwardly explained if one accepts the military role of the Levites, who may have been stationed in cities early in their history. The idea that the Levites may have performed

²⁹ See J.S. BADEN, “The Violent Origins of the Levites: Text and Tradition”, *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition* (eds. M.A. LEUCHTER – J.M. HUTTON) (Atlanta, GA 2011) 103-116.

³⁰ *DCH*, 4:527.

³¹ See J.M. HUTTON, “The Levitical Diaspora (II): Modern Perspectives on the Levitical Cities Lists (A Review of Opinions)”, *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition* (eds. M.A. LEUCHTER – J.M. HUTTON) (Atlanta, GA 2011) 45-81; J.R. Spencer, “Levitical Cities”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D.N. FREEDMAN) (New York 1992).

military duties in the border towns of the kingdom of Israel was first proposed by Edward Lipiński³².

The chronology of the biblical layers and traditions related to the Levites is difficult to establish, particularly pertaining to absolute dates, which are hardly possible to determine. It is, however, quite certain that in the relative chronology the tradition linking the Levites with the temple service is the most recent of the traditions and cannot predate the Babylonian exile³³. If so, the earlier stratum of tradition that highlights the Levites' role as soldiers fits in with the semantic field of the proposed Greek prototype, where *λαός* / *λαοί* meant "the people" as well as "soldiers" (cf. Hitt. *lahḫa* — "military campaign")³⁴. The very fact of the close semantic equivalents of the Hebrew *lewy* and Greek *λαός* / *λαοί*, along with the linguistic proximity of the terms **lew* and **ra-wo*, lead me to think that the etymology of the Hebrew term *levi* from the Greek Mycenaean **ra-wo* offers an explanation that is worthy of consideration.

* *
*
*
*

Both a foreign loan-word in Hebrew, denoting a group of people, and a recognition of this group as belonging to the same "tribal" tradition suggest that the linguistic contact must have occurred early. The linguistic borrowing of the group-name indicates that Hebrew-speaking people were in contact with this very group. In this epoch, the Levites, newcomers from the Aegean became part of the heterogeneous Hebrew-speaking society. It is hardly possible to establish the precise date for such a process, but the Sea Peoples' migration during the twelfth century BCE may be considered as one of the most plausible periods. If any later date were accepted, the hypothesis would have to be adjusted. The group-name would not be a loan-word from Mycenaean Greek, but a borrowing from Classical Greek, i.e., not from **ra-wo*, but directly from *λαοί*.

This hypothesis explains the conditions and indicates a cultural transfer from the Greek-speaking to the Hebrew-speaking environments. In effect, I argue that the Levites should be considered as a group of Greek-speaking mercenaries who managed to settle down in Canaan and integrate with the local population, preserving their own group name. In my view, the

³² E. LIPÍŃSKI, *On the Skirts of Canaan in the Iron Age*. Historical and Topographical Researches (OLA 153; Leuven 2006) 228.

³³ M.D. REHM, "Levites and Priests", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D.N. FREEDMAN) (New York 1992); CARDELLINI, *I Leviti*.

³⁴ *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*, vol. L-N (Chicago, IL 1989) 4.

hypothesis of the Greek origins of the Levites offers a better etymology for the name Levi as well as providing an explanation as to how some Mycenaean Greek loan-words reached the Hebrew-speaking population.

As the result of accepting the hypothesis of the Greek origins of the Levites, one would have to admit that the Hebrew Bible contains strata going back to the early Iron Age or that the Levites maintained their identity for a very long time. This is not the place to investigate these two issues, both of which may be correct. I would only venture to say that accepting this hypothesis opens up new heuristic horizons for a better understanding of the history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the early Iron Age.

Accepting the abovementioned hypothesis also allows us to recognize that if the Levites were Greek by origin, then — despite its paradoxical aspect — the most Jewish of the Jews were not originally Semites.

Faculty of History
University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland

Łukasz NIESIOŁOWSKI-SPANÒ

SUMMARY

The hypothesised relations between Mycenaean Greece and the Near East, especially Canaan in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, have led some scholars to propose Greek etymologies for a number of terms attested in the Hebrew Bible. This raises the question about possible vehicles for such cultural interrelations. To this end, this article advances the hypothesis that the Levites, a group featured in the biblical tradition, may have originated in the group that referred to itself in Greek as **ra-wo* / *λαοί*.