

THE BIBLE'S FIRST KINGS



Uncovering the Story of
Saul, David, and Solomon

AVRAHAM FAUST
ZEV I. FARBER

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Saul, David, and Solomon are dominant figures in the Hebrew Bible, rulers of an expanding Israelite polity before it dissolved into two separate kingdoms. Saul's paranoid jealousy, David's killing of the Philistine champion Goliath with a slingshot, and Solomon's meeting the Queen of Sheba are familiar stories to many people, but what is the truth behind the texts? While scholars long believed these three monarchs to have been historical personalities, over the past three decades many have questioned the historicity of this United Monarchy, some doubting even the existence of its founding fathers. This book robustly argues that the Israelite kingdom of the Bible was a real mini-empire, and that Saul, David, and Solomon were kings of consequence – even if the biblical stories reimagine their lives to glorify and vilify them. Combining fresh archaeological evidence with astute readings of key texts, the authors offer a compelling reconstruction of this fascinating ancient polity, which, though it lasted less than a hundred years, has bequeathed a remarkable religious and cultural legacy to the Western world. Written in a clear and engaging style, this book will be of interest to scholars and general audiences alike.

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*Uncovering the Story
of Saul, David, and Solomon*

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Preface

David and Solomon are dominant figures in the Hebrew Bible, more than almost any figure other than, perhaps, Moses. Not only do they hold a prominent place in the narrative sections, but later scribes attributed other biblical works, such as Psalms and Proverbs, to David and Solomon, respectively, to grant the books greater importance among the Judeans who venerated these figures.

Reverence for David and Solomon does not stop with the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke both present Jesus as connected to David's hometown of Bethlehem because Joseph, Jesus' father, is said to be a descendent of King David. The Quran speaks of David as the khalif of Allah who had the power to tell truth from falsehood, while Solomon was granted the power to control the wind, to speak with ants, and even to command demons and jinn.

Interest in David and Solomon continues into modern times not only among the devout but also in literature (e.g., Joseph Heller's *God Knows*), film (e.g., *David and Bathsheba* with Gregory Peck or *Solomon and Sheba* with Yul Brynner), and even self-help (e.g., *The Richest Man Who Ever Lived: King Solomon's Secrets to Success, Wealth, and Happiness* by the millionaire Steven K. Scott). And it goes without saying that a new book on David or Solomon is written yearly, sometimes from a religious or spiritual point of view, sometimes from an historical or archaeological one.

The kingdom that Saul, David, and Solomon established lasted less than 100 years according to the Bible, and historians would shrink this to not much more than 50 years. Nevertheless, it left its stamp on Israelite culture, and from there, world culture. In the West, there is no child who doesn't know about King David or Solomon and of young David's epic

victory over the giant warrior Goliath. Indeed, David remains one of the most popular names for boys until this very day, and from 2000 to 2020, the name David was in the top thirty names for boys every year (www.ssa.gov/cgi-bin/babyname.cgi).

Even with the reduction of the Bible's standing – and that of religion in general – in Western civilization, there has not been a concomitant lack of interest in these kings. Only the nature of the discourse about them has changed, and they are now in the very center of a stormy clash between conservative and liberal, and fundamentalist and nihilist.

Until recently, Saul, David, and Solomon were generally believed to have been real historical figures and biblical scholars would discuss the kingdom they founded as part of the historical and archaeological landscape of the Iron Age Levant. Over the past three decades, however, a sea change has taken place, with many Bible scholars questioning the historicity of this kingdom and some even doubting the existence of its founding figures.

While this skeptical attitude derives to some extent from scholarly considerations, it has been fueled mainly by the *zeitgeist* – that is, the prevalent spirit or mood of the current period, which abounds in skepticism about the past. The fact that an idea is in vogue doesn't make it true, however, and the criteria for determining the historicity of this ancient Israelite kingdom needs to remain in the realm of archaeology, anthropology, and critical study of the Bible.

The great interest and the heated debates fueled many new studies, and a vast amount of archaeological information has been collected over the past thirty years, sometimes reaching the headlines and steering the public's imagination. These include, for example, the so-called Palace of David in Jerusalem's City of David, the mines from "Solomon's age" at Khirbet en-Nahas and Timna in the Aravah, the fortified city from the time of King David at Khirbet Qeiyafa, near the Valley of Elah where the battle between David and Goliath is said to have taken place, and the impressive governor's residence at Tel 'Eton.

Until now, the new discoveries, as interesting and important as they are, have been consistently discussed and debated in their own right. No recent attempts at synthesizing the data in order to arrive at a broad understanding have been made.

In this book, we will look at what specific considerations led to the widespread skepticism about the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, and we will lay out the new archaeological findings over the past three decades that push in the other direction, showing that indeed there was such a kingdom, and that Saul, David, and Solomon were historical figures, even if the biblical story as we have it reworks their “real” actions and glorifies them considerably. In this book, we collate the archaeological information, combined with a critical reading of the biblical text and with insights from anthropology, and present a new historical reconstruction of the reality behind the biblical stories, with the goal of getting as close as we can – given current knowledge – to “what really happened” in this period.

The detailed discussion of abandoned villages, destroyed cities, new construction, and changes in pottery styles, together with diagnostic readings of the biblical text to determine its sources and their aims, paints a captivating picture: The kingdom had its roots in the dark age of Iron Age I, during which time no empires or large states existed. In their struggle for survival and dominance against the Philistines, a group of highland villagers gathered together to resist the encroaching enemy. A powerful warrior, Saul, arose as a leader of this emerging group, in the first step toward the creation of a new kingdom or what scholars often call a polity, and consolidated his control over much of this remote highland region.

Following Saul’s death, and taking advantage of the absence of real empires, David, a charismatic and ruthless leader, greatly expanded the new polity’s hegemony. He raided nearby regions, conquered some of them, and imposed his will on others. These campaigns and raids sent shock waves across large areas, expressed in large-scale abandonment of villages and the destruction of cities.

Within a generation, the emerging polity took control over much of the region. As is often the case with such local powers, the new kingdom survived one more generation, and it was David’s son Solomon who managed to arrange and administer the territory under his control, leaving clear fingerprints in the form of impressive buildings. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom disintegrated, dividing into two separate and much smaller and weaker polities, Israel and Judah, that would continue on for centuries, eventually producing the Bible.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book begins with a simple retelling of the biblical story of Saul, David, and Solomon, to remind the readers of the main details. This is followed by an analysis of the problems biblical scholars have noted with the story, its inner contradictions and polemics, and what was long considered its historical core. We then describe the sea change that led biblical scholars to doubt the historicity of the story in its entirety, and the increased dominance of archaeology in evaluating the material, resulting in many contemporary biblical scholars viewing the kingdom of David and Solomon as imaginary.

We will then see that this negative assessment was overstated even in the 1990s, and that the many archaeological discoveries made over the past generation paint a far more positive picture. To this latter point we dedicate nine chapters, the bulk of the book. Each examines one set of archaeological features – settlement patterns, pottery forms, destruction layers, fortifications, and more – that reveal major changes and transformations that took place at that time, all of which can be associated with the emergence of a new kingdom.

After coalescing the data into a full picture, we turn to an anthropological overview of the way kingdoms and empires throughout the world emerge and disintegrate. The book culminates by integrating the archaeological, biblical, and anthropological data, proposing a detailed, critical reconstruction of the history behind the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon, and ends with retelling the history of the United Monarchy as we believe it happened.

A NOTE TO THE READER

The following discussion is very detailed and includes a new synthesis of archaeological data and a fresh attempt to reconstruct the formation of the Israelite monarchy and the history of its first kings. Still, the book is not aimed only at specialists and was written with a broad audience in mind. Therefore, we wrote the book in a clear manner, avoiding jargon – or explaining it when it was necessary – and minimized the use of references and notes. Often, when a given argument was based on a previously

PREFACE

published article, we simply refer readers to this publication and its notes and bibliography, adding references sparingly, mainly to support new information, when quoting someone, or when a resource seemed especially important. In this way, we have tried to strike a balance, on one hand to allow archaeologists and biblical scholars to make use of the book for their own work, while on the other keeping it accessible to students, scholars from other fields, and even lay readers interested in general history and/or the Bible.

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of many years of research into the reality of the tenth century and the debate over the United Monarchy. The ideas expressed in the book were formulated and developed over many years, and some of them were presented in conferences or were published in earlier forms in different venues (see references in the different chapters). In the course of this long period, we benefited greatly from the discussion and advice of many people, and from comments on these presentations and publications. A partial list of individuals who contributed to the development of the ideas presented in this book and helped in various ways includes Daniel Master, David Schloen, Gunnar Lehmann, Baruch Halpern, Jimmy Hardin, Joshua Schwartz, Avi Shveka, Eyal Baruch, Zeev Safrai, Yair Sapir, Zvi Lederman, Amihai Mazar, Israel Knohl, Jacob Wright, and Charles and Mary Foster, as well as the late Larry Stager and Shlomo Bunimovitz ז"ל. Thanks are also due to Michal Marmelshtein and Vered Yacobi for their help with the figures and other aspects of the production of this volume. None of these individuals is responsible for the content of the book, and the responsibility for the ideas presented here, and for any mistake or error, is of course ours alone.

Part I

The United Monarchy in the Bible and Contemporary Scholarship

The period of the United Monarchy – that is, the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon – is regarded as a formative period in biblical history, and (mostly) as a golden age.¹ As the Bible presents it, this grand kingdom existed for around a century. Applying modern dating conventions to the biblical data – the Bible doesn’t use dates – the United Monarchy would have begun in approximately the late eleventh century BCE, ending around the last quarter of the tenth century BCE (see Excursus 3.1).

¹ The term “United Monarchy” is a scholarly construct used to define the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, who ruled over “all” the Israelites, in all the territories that later became the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, and even beyond. We do not take the word “united” to refer to a united “Israel” and “Judah,” especially as we consider the latter title (Judah) to be a late one, developing mostly after the division of the monarchy (and/or the creation of two separate polities) to designate the southern kingdom (Faust forthcoming b; see also Leonard-Fleckman 2015). In this book, we often prefer the term “highland polity,” and use the term “United Monarchy” sparingly, when relevant to the discussion. Even then we use it as a generic term for the kingdom that the Bible attributes to Saul, David, and Solomon.

Is the United Monarchy a historical phenomenon or a biblical myth? If indeed it did exist, what parts of the biblical narratives about this period can be said to have “really” happened? This is one of the most contested issues in Iron Age Levantine archaeology, Israelite history, and biblical studies, and is the question we will be tackling in this book. In order to do so, we must start with the Bible and the nature of the current scholarly dispute about the United Monarchy. Thus, Part I is divided into three main chapters.

Chapter 1 runs through the biblical story as it is, highlighting the main themes and accounts. Chapter 2 critically evaluates the biblical texts and traditions about Saul, David, and Solomon, using the characteristic methods of academic biblical scholarship. Here we will see which segments of the narrative were regarded until recently as historical and which were not, and why.

Chapter 3 turns from the Bible to archaeology and can itself be subdivided into two parts. In the first part, after briefly summarizing what had been the scholarly consensus until some thirty years ago, we will explain why this consensus has faded away, taking with it much of the glory of David and Solomon, and why much more skeptical approaches are dominant today among biblical scholars.

The second part presents a reanalysis of the archaeological evidence, especially in light of the new data gathered over the past two decades, which indicates that the skeptical approach did not stand the test of time and most of the problems raised in the past have been disproved. Indeed, as we will show, the skeptical approach that became dominant in biblical scholarship, which we find overly simplistic, is largely based on the way many biblical scholars *think* archaeologists interpret the archaeological reality of this era.

By noting the problems and shortcomings of the approach that denies the historicity of the United Monarchy almost entirely, we will be laying the groundwork for the argument that archaeology actually points to the existence of this kingdom, which will be the theme of the central part of the book (Part II).

A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON CHRONOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY

As is well known, archaeological periods are divided into the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages. In this book, we deal a little with the final phase

of the Bronze Age – known as the Late Bronze Age – which covers approximately the years 1550–1200 BCE. During most of this period, the region, known interchangeably as the Land of Israel, Canaan, the Holy Land, Palestine, et cetera (and defined later in this chapter), was under Egyptian control. This is the period before Israel enters the scene and the population, broadly speaking, was Canaanite.

The Iron Age, which is our main focus, roughly covers 1200–586 BCE, and is divided into a number of subperiods. (We will discuss some of the finer chronological aspects of the period, especially concerning the tenth century, in Excursus 3.1.)

Iron Age I, circa 1200–970 BCE, covers roughly the biblical period of the judges. This is the pre-monarchic period, and it is characterized by the establishment, from the thirteenth century, of many small villages in the highlands, in a process often referred to as the Israelite settlement. Slightly later, in the early twelfth century, the Philistines settled on the southern coastal plain. The valleys were mostly inhabited by the Canaanites, who had already been living there in the Bronze Age.

Iron Age II, roughly 970–586 BCE, equals the period of the monarchy. This is when urban settlements developed in the highlands, the economy was greatly advanced, and social complexity increased. The first phase of this era, known as Iron Age IIA, covers approximately the years 970–830 BCE. Its first part approximately parallels the time the Bible allocates to David and Solomon, which existed during much of the tenth century.

Box: The Lay of the Land . . . Literally

Geographically, this study focuses on a narrow strip on the westernmost edge of Asia, between the Mediterranean in the west and the desert in the east. This narrow strip, which is part of the fertile crescent, served as a sort of land bridge connecting Africa and Asia, and even Europe. The entire region is often called the Levant – a Eurocentric term meaning rising, namely the place where the sun rises – that is, the east.

Box: (cont.)

The term Levant covers the entire strip, from southern Turkey all the way to the Sinai Desert, today part of Egypt, but our focus in the book will be on its southern half, which covers the area from the Mediterranean in the west to the Arabian (or Syrian) desert in the east, and from the Negev or Sinai Desert in the south to southern Lebanon in the north.

In modern terms, the region incorporates the State of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the western part of the Kingdom of Jordan, and the southern tip of Lebanon. In biblical tradition, the region is also known as the Holy Land or the Promised Land. Jewish tradition refers to it as the Land of Israel (Eretz Israel) while Euro-Christian tradition often uses the term Palestine (going back to Roman usage).²

The Jordan River divides the region into two subregions; the eastern is often called Transjordan or eastern Palestine, and the western is often referred to as Cisjordan, western Palestine, or ancient Israel.

All in all, the region is quite small, covering some 25,000 square kilometers – something like Maryland in the US. Despite its small size, the area incorporates diverse topographical and ecological niches. Broadly, it is divided into four longitudinal zones (Figure 1):

- (1) **The Mediterranean coastal plain** was of great economic significance, as its ports and anchorages supplied the area with access to the lucrative maritime trade, and its inner parts controlled the international highway connecting Egypt and Syria–Mesopotamia. During the Iron Age, the northern part of the coastal plain was mostly a hinterland of the major Phoenician port of Tyre, although parts of it were also dominated by the Kingdom of Israel. The central coastal plain was mostly part of the Kingdom

² It roughly corresponds with the southern part of Bilad al-Sham of the Islamic caliphates; it was not a political or a geographical entity in its own right in the Islamic tradition.

Box: (cont.)

of Israel – its major part is the marshy Sharon. The southern coastal plain, which is much wider than its more northern parts, is also called Philistia, and was the home of the major Philistine cities, as well as to many Canaanite settlements.

- (2) **The central highland ridge** is composed of the hills of Judea, Samaria, and also the Galilee. This was the heart of the Kingdoms of Judah (in the south) and Israel (centered in the area of Samaria, but dominating large areas further north). Although less accessible, the highlands could produce surpluses of wine and olive oil. The Negev Highlands farther south were also part of this zone, but were much drier.
- (3) **The rift valley**, located further east, is where the Jordan River flows from the north, through the Sea of Galilee, toward the Dead Sea. The northernmost valleys are the Ayun and the Hulah Valleys, and to their south are the Kinrot Valley (around the Sea of Galilee), the Beth-Shean Valley, the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and then the Aravah, stretching from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea. The region is very fertile in the north, where it was part of the so-called northern valleys, and arid – even very arid – in the south.
- (4) **The Transjordanian highlands** included the Gilead in the north (part of the Kingdom of Israel during most of the Iron Age), and the Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom. The important King's Highway, connecting Arabia and Syria, passed through this region.

These longitudinal – that is, north–south – zones were cut by a few valley systems connecting the coastal plain and the rift valley. In the north, the fertile Jezreel Valley cut the highland ridge and provided easy east–west access, hosting an important system of roads, including a few branches of the international highway. These valleys also served as the breadbasket of the region. In the south, we have the Arad–Beersheba Valleys, and the routes connecting Transjordan and the King's Highway to the Mediterranean ports of Gaza and Ashkelon.

Box: (cont.)



Figure 1 Map of the region (base map, courtesy of Gunnar Lehmann)

The north had much greater agricultural potential than the south, both because precipitation declines as one moves southward, and on account of the large fertile valleys in the north. The

Box: (cont.)

fact that the major roads crossed the north, as well as the latter's proximity to Tyre, made its economic potential greater by far than that of the southern parts. Indeed, throughout history, the north was politically and economically more important than the south. The southernmost regions (the Negev) were practically a desert.

CHAPTER 1

Israel's United Monarchy

The Biblical Story

Before we begin our critical, scientific inquiry into the history of Saul, David, and Solomon, let us run through the main elements of the biblical story itself.

THE TIME OF THE JUDGES: BEFORE THERE WERE KINGS

As the Bible tells it, before the rise of the monarchy, the tribes of Israel are scattered in many small villages throughout the highlands, without central leadership. Nevertheless, when Israelite tribes are pressed by their enemies, charismatic leaders from different tribes, known as *shofetim*, “chieftains” or “judges,” rise to the task, leading the Israelites in battle against their foes.

Thus, when the Moabite king Eglon attacks Israel, Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin assassinates him. Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh, fights off Midianite raiders, while Jephthah, from the Gilead, leads the Israelites in battle against the Ammonites.

Each battle account generally mentions a tribe or so specifically, implying that the bulk of the fighting is carried out by the locals facing down a threat. The most extreme example of the limited scope of the battle is Samson from the coastal tribe of Dan, who fights a private war against the Philistines with no Israelite combatants other than himself.

The war against the Canaanite city of Hazor and its powerful general, Sisera, is atypical since the nominal leader of Israel in this account is Deborah from the tribe of Ephraim, which is far south of Hazor. Moreover, in the song of Deborah (Judges 5), she mentions multiple tribes – though not all twelve – that assist in the campaign. Even so, the leader of the battle is Barak from the northern tribe of Naphtali, and the narrative in

Judges 4 singles out this tribe and that of Zebulun, also northern, as the main combatants.

Leadership in this period emerged on an ad hoc basis, with charismatic leaders from varying tribes appearing and disappearing over time. Moreover, the book of Judges references two separate civil wars emerging from inner tribal conflicts, and in its final chapters, laments, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

SAMUEL AND THE RISE OF THE MONARCHY

Israel's final "judge" is an Ephraimite prophet named Samuel, the first-born of Hannah – the (until then) barren wife of an Ephraimite man called Elkanah – who devotes him to the shrine in Shiloh. There he grows up under the tutelage of the priest Eli, who serves as Israel's judge. Eli's sons are killed in battle with the Philistines, and soon after, Eli himself dies and Samuel takes the reins.

When Samuel himself reaches old age, he wishes to transmit the "judgeship" to his sons, but the elders of Israel reject them as corrupt. Instead, the Israelites want Samuel to appoint a king, like other groups have, to rule over them and lead them in battles; the Israelites were hard-pressed by the Philistines both before and after the time of Samuel.

God tells Samuel that, while the request is offensive, Samuel should comply. Samuel warns the Israelites of the dangers they face as a consequence of the powers a king will have over them. The Israelites insist, and Samuel capitulates. The chosen king is Saul son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin in southern Samaria, just north of Jerusalem.

THE REIGN OF SAUL

Saul's first challenge is when Nahash ("Snake" in Hebrew), the king of Ammon, besieges the Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead – located in the Gilead in northern Transjordan – cruelly insisting that each man gouge out his right eye. The people of Jabesh-gilead send messengers all over Israel to see if anyone can come to their rescue.

As Saul returns from plowing his field, he hears the story and is so outraged that he slices the yoke of his oxen into pieces and sends each to

a different tribe of Israel with the message “this is what will happen to your cattle” if you don’t come and fight the Ammonites. Saul musters the troops and they roundly defeat Nahash’s army in battle. The people are jubilant, and they follow this victory up with a public ceremony in Gilgal, in which Samuel crowns Saul.

The baton is now turned over to Saul, who begins his reign with a war against the Philistines, Israel’s main foe. By this time, the Philistines have taken control over the highlands – part of their success is credited to their monopoly over smithing, leaving the Israelites with hardly any weapons – and have even established garrisons in the Benjaminite tribal area at the heart of the Israelite territory. Saul’s son, Jonathan, strikes the first blow against the enemy in Geba. In a feat of heroics, Jonathan and his arms-bearer defeat a Philistine garrison on their own, after which Saul leads the troops into battle and the Philistines retreat in a panic.

Saul next turns his attention to another enemy of Israel, the Amalekites, whose city Samuel commands him to utterly destroy. After warning his Kenite allies to leave the city, Saul carries out the attack as commanded, captures the city, and chases down the Amalekites to the border of Egypt.

While militarily Saul is quite successful, not all is well between him and Samuel. Twice Saul violates Samuel’s commands – once in Gilgal when Saul did not wait for Samuel and made a sacrifice on his own, and again when Saul spared the Amalekite king and allowed his men to take some animals as spoil. As a result of these sins, Samuel declares that Saul will not establish a dynasty and that God will give the throne to someone else. Subsequently, the spirit of God leaves Saul, and for the rest of his life, Saul suffers from periodic bouts of paranoid depression, which leads to the hiring of a young musician named David to play music to soothe Saul’s spirit.

When war next breaks out between Israel and the Philistines, it is in the territory of Judah to the south. Saul encamps in the Valley of Elah. A colossal man from the Philistine encampment named Goliath comes forward and challenges a champion from among the Israelites to fight him in single combat, but there are no takers.

This happens day after day until one day, David comes from his home in Bethlehem to bring provisions to his older brothers serving on the front lines. He hears Goliath’s taunt and announces that if no one else is willing,

he will fight the huge warrior himself with nothing but his regular clothing and a slingshot, as he has no weapon or armor. Seeing David, Goliath mocks the Israelites for sending a boy to do a man's job, but David slingshots Goliath in the head and kills him. After this, a battle takes place, and the Philistines are routed and flee to their home territory.

Impressed by David's bravery, Saul appoints him chief of his warriors, and Jonathan is so enamored with David that he gives him his cloak, sword, bow, and belt, and makes a friendship pact with him. David is a profound success as a warrior, and when the army returns from battle, women sing "Saul has killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands."

From here onward, Saul develops a paranoid hatred for David, who, unbeknownst to Saul, has already been anointed by Samuel as Israel's future king. Once, Saul throws a spear at David but misses, after which Saul decides on a subtler method. His daughter Michal loves David, and Saul promises her to him in marriage in exchange for 100 Philistine foreskins. Saul's hope is that David will get himself killed, but instead, David more than succeeds and marries Michal, to Saul's chagrin.

Next, Saul has his men surround David's home. Realizing her husband is in danger, Michal places a household idol with a net of goat's hair on its head in David's bed and covers it with a blanket while David escapes out a window and runs away to Samuel in Ramah. Ultimately, Jonathan warns David that Saul is not going to stop trying to kill him, and David flees south.

On his way, David stops at Nob, a city of priests, for provisions. When Saul eventually hears of this, he flies into a fit of rage, accusing his men of conspiring against him, and slaughters everyone in the town. The high priest's son, Abiathar, escapes the carnage, and runs away to David with the ephod oracle.

Meanwhile, David heads to Philistine Gath for refuge, but is soon recognized as one of the Philistines' mortal enemies. Always quick on his feet, David pretends to be a crazy person, scratching the walls and drooling, and King Achish throws him out, quipping that his quota of crazies has already been filled.

With no place to go, David makes his base in a cave near Adullam, where the Judean highlands and lowlands meet. Others who are in dire straits and wish to live outside of society join him. Thus, David is quickly

transformed into the leader of a band of outlaws who offers protection – real and what appears to be Mafia-style – to Judah’s shepherds.

At one point, David hears that the Philistines have besieged the nearby town of Keilah. He goes to Keilah and assists the people of the town. Realizing that the people will inevitably turn him over to the king, he leaves the town and heads for the wilderness. There, Saul pursues him time and again, continually helped by locals who report sightings of David’s band.

Thinking that it would only be a matter of time before Saul catches up with him, David (again) goes to King Achish of Gath and pledges loyalty as a vassal. Achish grants David the city of Ziklag to rule and David promises to give Achish a cut of the booty whenever he raids. While David pretends to be raiding Israelite villages in Judah, in practice, he limits his raids to non-Israelite clans such as the Amalekites and Geshurites.

Meanwhile, Saul prepares for a major battle with these same Philistines in the Jezreel Valley. David accompanies Achish into war against Saul, but when the Philistine officers object, saying David cannot be trusted to fight his own people, Achish sends him back to Ziklag, where he battles Amalekite raiders.

The Philistines win the Jezreel Valley battle, and Saul’s last stand is upon Mount Gilboa on the valley’s southern border. Finding himself alone and his sons already dead, Saul falls on his sword to avoid becoming a living trophy, and his arms-bearer does the same. When the Philistines find Saul and Jonathan’s bodies, they impale them on the walls of Beth-Shean. Late at night, the men of Jabesh-gilead, whom Saul had saved years before, sneak their bodies down, cremate them, and bury their bones.

As should be clear from this summary, the biblical account of Saul is chock-full of personal details about his life, battles, family, and personality, but very sparse on concrete information. When describing Saul’s inner circle, other than listing the names of his wives and children, the text names only one official, his general, Abner, who was also his first cousin. We don’t even know how long Saul ruled, as the verse that summarizes this information is textually corrupt (1 Samuel 13:1).¹

¹ The verse says that he was one year old when he came to power and that his reign lasted two years. This is obviously a scribal error.

We are on a little better footing when it comes to the geographical scope of Saul's kingdom. Although he is the king of all twelve tribes of Israel, in practice, the region under his direct control is more circumscribed. Saul rules from the territory of Benjamin but also controls the territory of Judah, and we read about his forays into the Shephelah, the Judean Desert, and the Negev. Northward, his practical control apparently ends at the northern edge of the Samarian highlands, where he is defeated by the Philistines. In the Transjordan, he is described as winning a decisive battle as far north as Jabesh-gilead.

THE REIGN OF DAVID

David is in the town of Ziklag when he hears about the death of Saul from an Amalekite battlefield scavenger. The man tells David that he, the Amalekite, dealt Saul the final blow at the king's own behest, and then presents David with Saul's crown and armband. David has him executed on the spot for killing the LORD's anointed, and he then composes a lamentation for Saul and Jonathan, the famous "how have the mighty fallen?!"

Even so, David interprets Saul's death as the awaited sign for him to take his rightful place as successor. Thus, David heads to the city of Hebron in Judah and is crowned king over the Israelites in that region, whence he rules for seven years. The rest of Israel, however, including Saul's general, Abner, support Ish-boshet (aka Ish-baal),² a surviving son of Saul.

Ish-boshet makes his capital in Mahanaim in northern Transjordan, but he is overall unsuccessful and soon loses even Abner's support. Abner tells David that he is ready to support him instead, to which David responds that Abner had better make sure to bring Michal along with him – she had been given to a man named Palti while David was an outlaw – and Abner complies. David's commander, Joab, however, cannot accept this rapprochement and, pretending to greet Abner, stabs him in the heart.

Soon after this, Ish-boshet is assassinated, leaving David as the de facto king of all Israel. Later, David impales many of Saul's (remaining) descendants to appease God's anger with Saul for having faithlessly

² Ish-boshet is a way for the biblical author to avoid using the name of a foreign deity (Baal) while denigrating both the god's name and the biblical character.

slaughtered Gibeonites, though he makes a pact with Mephiboshet, Jonathan's disabled son, offering him lifetime support.

David's first move as the king of all Israel is to conquer the Jebusite town of Jerusalem, which stands at the border between Judah (David's tribe) and the northern tribes. Jerusalem becomes his permanent capital, whence he rules for an additional thirty-three years.

After conquering the city, David builds himself a palace with cedarwood, using carpenters sent to him by King Hiram of Tyre. David then decides to bring the Ark of the LORD into his new capital from its current home in Kiryat-yearim. He even contemplates building a temple, but Nathan the prophet tells him that this will be the job of his progeny.

Once David is established in Jerusalem, the Philistines attack, but David defeats them again and again. From this point on, the book of Samuel makes no further references to confrontations with the Philistines, implying that David finally neutralized Israel's most powerful foe. This success ushers in a long sequence of expansion wars.

David conquers Edom (in southern Transjordan) and stations garrisons there. He conquers Moab, just north of Edom, killing many of the males and making the rest vassal subjects. He then continues north, defeats the king of Zobah (in modern-day Syria), conquers Damascus, and makes a peace treaty with Toi, the king of Hamath.

Another major war begins in the east when Nahash, the king of Ammon, dies, and David sends official messengers to offer condolences to his son, Hanun. Suspicious of David's motives, the local officials convince the new king to humiliate the Israelite emissaries by cutting off parts of their beards and garments. Realizing that this would provoke David, the Ammonites prepare themselves by making an alliance with the Aramean kingdoms of Beth-Rechob, Zobah, Maacah, and Tov.

David of course takes the humiliation of his emissaries as an act of war and attacks Ammon's capital, Rabbah (modern-day Amman). Ammon's Aramean allies flee, and the Ammonites lock themselves in their city. David then leads his army against the Arameans, who surrender and become Israel's vassals. The Ammonite capital itself requires a protracted siege, and David heads home, leaving Joab to manage it.

It is during this siege that David, standing on the roof of his palace, sees Bathsheba bathing and has her brought to him. When Bathsheba

finds that she is pregnant, David tries to hide the affair, first by sending her husband, Uriah the Hittite, home to sleep with his wife, which he refuses to do, and then by having Joab make sure that Uriah dies in battle, after which David marries Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan tells David that he will suffer for this sin, and the baby born from the affair dies. This is followed by a cascade of tragedies.

David's eldest son, Amnon, finds himself attracted to his half sister Tamar and rapes her. Two years later, Absalom – Tamar's full brother – murders Amnon in retaliation. Absalom then escapes to the realm of his maternal grandfather, the king of Geshur, a small Aramean kingdom on Israel's northern border, and remains there for three years. After his return, he carries out a coup against his father, forcing David to flee.

David's army remains loyal, including a brigade of men led by Ittai the Gittite (i.e., from Philistine Gath). Thanks to spies David leaves in Jerusalem, he has time to escape to Mahanaim in the Transjordan, gather his allies, including Shobi, the king of Ammon, and get his troops ready for a confrontation. Absalom eventually arrives with his Judahite general, Amasa, but despite the large size of his army, it is no match for David's hardened veterans. Against David's orders, Joab kills Absalom and stabs Amasa in the heart.

As David is heading home, a fight breaks out between the Judahites and the Israelites, leading a man named Sheba ben Bichri to declare that Israel is done with David and that the Israelites should all return to their cities, which they do. Joab pursues Sheba as far north as Abel Beth-maachah, where a local woman has the rebel's head lobbed over the wall to avoid a siege.

All in all, the biblical David is a charismatic ruler who, in the course of his forty years of rule, creates a vast kingdom, subduing most of his neighbors. He rules over a large territory stretching from the Negev and Edom in the south, to parts of Syria in the north, including most of both the Cisjordan and the Transjordan.

The Bible tells us little about David's trade relations or building activities, other than the palace he builds in Jerusalem with the help of Tyrian artisans. Instead, the stories focus mostly on his military might, along with court politics and intrigues.

Unlike his predecessor, however, David has an administration extending beyond just immediate family and one general. 2 Samuel 8:16–18 mentions:

Joab son of Zeruiah over the (regular) army,³ Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the Kerethites and Pelethites (apparently battalions of foreign mercenaries), Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud as recorder, Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelek son of Abiathar as priests, Seraiah as secretary, and David's sons as priests (a similar, though not identical list appears in 2 Samuel 20:23–26).

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

When David is upon his deathbed, his eldest surviving son, Adonijah, holds a feast with Joab and Abiathar the priest in attendance and declares himself heir to the throne. Back in the palace, however, Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan convince David – truly or falsely – that he had promised Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be heir. David agrees to this and Solomon is crowned that very day with the further support of the general Benaiah, the priest Zadok, and, of course, Nathan.

David dies soon after, and Solomon, following his father's advice, has Joab killed, as well as a Benjaminite man named Shimei, who had cursed David during his retreat from Absalom. Solomon also banishes Abiathar and, after Adonijah expresses interest in marrying one of David's former concubines (Abishag), Solomon has him killed as well.

Solomon then goes to the worship site in Gibeon. That night, God comes to him in a dream and asks what he wishes. When Solomon requests wisdom, God grants it together with wealth and success.

Solomon becomes famous for his wisdom, his proverbs, and his vast knowledge of nature, including animals, fish, and trees. People from all over the world, including the Queen of Sheba, come to Jerusalem to hear his wisdom and to see his immense wealth.

Like his father, Solomon rules for forty years, but, unlike his father's reign, his reign is depicted as one of peace accompanied by great prosperity, extensive international trade, and widespread construction. No territorial expansion is attributed to him. Instead, over time, the territory he controls shrinks.

³ According to 1 Chronicles 2:15–16, Joab's mother, Zeruiah, was David's sister, making Joab and Abishai David's nephews. This would make Joab's appointment as general similar in nature to Saul's appointment of Abner, his first cousin, as general. Still, the book of Samuel never mentions this family connection.

Notably, the description of Solomon's reign includes much less personal information and court intrigue and far more technical details of his rule, his administration, and especially his building activities. His most extensive building projects are, naturally, in Jerusalem. In addition to city walls, Solomon builds a temple using imported cedar, gold trimmings, artistic tapestries, carvings, and other expensive touches. This takes him seven years. At the same time, he builds a much larger palace, which takes him thirteen years, and this too has elaborate features, including a huge, pillared house of cedar.

To accomplish these feats, Solomon makes use of Phoenician artisans from Tyre and imports cedar, which, according to 2 Chronicles 2:15, was brought by sea to the area of Jaffa and from there by land to Jerusalem. The expense is so great that Solomon needs to pay Tyre's King Hiram by gifting him a host of Israelite cities in the western Galilee.

Solomon also builds up other cities throughout the country such as Megiddo, Gezer, Hazor, Beth-horon, Tamar (Tadmor), and the Red Sea port city of Etzion geber. Some of these cities serve as administrative centers, others for tax collection, and yet others for trade, greatly increasing both Solomon's wealth and his fame. The trade is conducted in cooperation with the Tyrians, the renowned merchants and masters of the seas.

Solomon controls his kingdom and finances his activities through a sophisticated administration. 1 Kings 4:2–6 mentions the following ministers: Azariah son of Zadok, the priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah sons of Shisha, secretaries; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud, recorder; Benaiah son of Jehoiada, commander of the army; Zadok and Abiathar, priests; Azariah son of Nathan, in charge of the district governors; Zabud son of Nathan – a priest and adviser to the king; Ahishar, palace administrator; and Adoniram son of Abda, in charge of forced labor.

A certain amount of continuity with David's court can be seen, as some positions already existed under David and some of the officials (or their fathers) even served under him, but there are also developments: The list is both longer, including more officials, and it is also more "unified." For example, we now have only one military commander. Moreover, the position of Azariah son of Nathan is classically bureaucratic, as he oversees twelve district governors (1 Kings 4:7–19), each, in turn, administering part of the country, extending well beyond the original territories of the Israelite

tribes. These twelve districts perform *corvée* labor to support the palace for a month out of the year, maintaining the king's large administration, lavish lifestyle, and constant building projects.

Solomon also marries scores of women, including the pharaoh's daughter, for whom he builds a separate palace. Some of these women have worship sites for their foreign gods. This angers Israel's God, YHWH, who rains political havoc down on Solomon, which characterizes his later years on the crown. First, Hadad of Edom rebels against Solomon. Next, Rezon the Aramean rebels against Solomon's ally, Hadadezer king of Zobah, and as part of his rebellion, Rezon takes Damascus away from Israel and becomes an enemy of Solomon.

Most significantly, God sends the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh to tell an Ephraimite man named Jeroboam that God is tearing away the kingdom from Solomon's family and giving it to him (Jeroboam), leaving the "house of David" with only Judah to rule. Hearing of this, Solomon comes after Jeroboam, who escapes to Egypt.

DIVISION: THE END OF THE UNITED MONARCHY

Solomon's death brings with it the end of a glorious era. The people of Israel ask Solomon's son, Rehoboam, to go easier on them than Solomon did with the *corvée*-labor burden. After consulting with his advisers, Rehoboam finds himself on the side of the young hotheads and famously responds "my little finger is thicker than my father's loins . . . he flogged you with whips, but I will flog you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:10–15).

The northerners declare that they have no portion in the house of Jesse (David's father), and they secede. They call for Jeroboam, whom they declare the first king of the northern polity of Israel, and Rehoboam is left with only Judah. Rehoboam's attempt to gather an army fails, partly because Pharaoh Shishak invades Jerusalem, and Rehoboam must pay Egypt an exorbitant fee to leave.

In the end, Rehoboam has neither the support, loyalty, nor talent to bring the northern tribes back into his kingdom. From then until the destruction of Israel (ca. 722/720 BCE), the two kingdoms live on as politically distinct entities, and the "United" Monarchy is never to return.

CHAPTER 2

Untangling the Threads of the Biblical Account with Literary Critical Scholarship

THE STORY OUTLINED IN Chapter 1 is a basic summary of what the Bible tells us about Israel's United Monarchy in the books of Samuel and Kings.¹ But is it history? Is it fiction? Somewhere in between? While some scholars read the text as an integrated whole and others read it as a text composed of sources and revised over time, from its inception, critical Bible study has noted that the narrative contains tensions and even contradictions that demonstrate the impossibility of accepting the details of the biblical narrative as an accurate reporting of events.

Nevertheless, scholars long distinguished between the core narrative arc of the Saul and David stories, which was relatively consistent between the sources, and the many contradictions, alternative details, and smaller points, which were understood as attempts at polemic and apologetics, pushing one agenda or another, or simply rhetorical flourish. Until recently, this observation about the overall narrative arc led most scholars to accept the core story as historical.²

¹ Chronicles has a slightly different version of some aspects of the story, but as Samuel and Kings are older books, and since the landmark study of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (*Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 1806–7), they are generally seen as more historically reliable, we focus on these. The point about Chronicles was further developed in Wellhausen 1957: 172–227; Noth 1987. For a discussion of how Chronicles rewrites historical episodes from Samuel and Kings based on ideological considerations, see Japhet 1989. For a different approach, arguing that Samuel-Kings and Chronicles are each working off an older lost text, see Auld 1994.

² See, for example, Noth 1960; Bright 1972; Ishida 1983; Maxwell Miller and Hayes 1986; Ahlström 1993: 421–542.

The reason this consensus has changed is primarily due to broader, archaeological considerations, discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, we will look at the many inconsistencies critical scholarship has noted in the biblical narrative, which demonstrate that many of the details in these accounts cannot be taken at face value as historical. At the same time, we will note why this critical reading of the text led scholars to believe in the historicity of the bigger picture.

THE STORIES OF SAUL, DAVID, SOLOMON, AND REHOBOAM: NOT A HISTORICAL RECORD

When read straight through quickly, as one might read a novel, the biblical narrative in the books of Samuel and Kings reads tolerably well. Indeed, an entire school of biblical scholarship reads it as an integrated whole, focusing on the final form of the text and not on its sources and development (see box “The Literary Approach to Samuel”).

Despite the importance of this school and its contribution to scholarship, this approach has a relatively limited scope, confining itself to the final form of the narratives and questions of literary structure and style. It has little to contribute to questions of historicity, and its focus on trying to make the whole cohere goes against the thrust of the dominant source and redaction-critical trend in scholarship, which takes note of narrative tensions in a desire to speculate about how the text was put together. These latter methods (i.e., source and redaction criticism) go hip-and-socket with historical studies and are of great importance for the historical discussion advanced in this book.

As the biblical story is composed of hundreds of verses and has been studied in great depth for centuries, we cannot give an exhaustive presentation of all of the critical issues in the text, but the sampling we feature in this chapter should give the reader a good sense of the key issues. Let us start with what is perhaps the most serious problem in the narrative of the formation of the monarchy, namely the origin stories of Saul and David.

Box: The Literary Approach to Samuel

At the risk of oversimplifying, we can divide the scholars who study the books of Samuel in its current form into two main sub-schools of thought: structuralists who believe it was authored, at least primarily, by one person, and final-form critics who believe the text made use of written sources but was edited by such a literary savvy, hands-on editor that we cannot profitably attempt to reconstruct this person's sources, and we best focus on the literary composition before us.

A classic example of the first school is the work of Dutch Bible scholar Jan Fokkelman in his four-volume *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Book of Samuel* (which includes a treatment of 1 Kgs. 1–2). In his various introductions, Fokkelman discusses the importance of isolating literary units of various sizes – sentences, scenes, acts, and so forth – paying special attention to language. Fokkelman utilizes a twelve-step framework that goes from sounds to book, a method, he argues, applicable to any form of writing, from novels to newspapers (it is tweaked somewhat for poetry).

The limitation of this model, he notes, is that it deals only with the text and does not take historical questions into consideration.³ Fokkelman does not deny that historical authors may have had motives, but dealing with these in a literary analysis, he claims, falls prey to the “intentional fallacy” that a work of art should be judged based on the intention of the author.⁴

For our purposes, the main point to note is that structuralist literary readings do not deal with the historical aspects of a work but its artistic aspects. To highlight the point, let us take an analysis of Shakespeare. His story *Love's Labor Lost* is entirely original, his *Troilus and Cressida* is based on Greek myth and its retelling by Chaucer, and his *Julius Caesar* is based on a real historical figure and event. This may be of interest to historians studying the influences on Shakespeare, but structuralist

³ Fokkelman 1981–93: 2:12.

⁴ Fokkelman 1981–93: 1:3. The concept itself is based on Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954.

Box: (cont.)

literary readers like Fokkelman would approach all of these works the same way.

Fokkelman's analysis of Samuel, though very insightful, fails to convince most scholars that the author was not working with literary (i.e., written) sources. Indeed, many literary scholars belonging to our second sub-school make this admission.

Robert Alter, for instance, in his introduction to Samuel, admits to some amount of Deuteronomistic redactions, and even that the ark narrative may be an entirely different source spliced in.⁵ Still, for him, the final form of the text is the focus of attention.

An even stronger statement comes from Shimon Bar-Efrat, who notes: "The Book of Samuel is not of a piece, but a redacted work. It is possible to identify differences in style and narrative tenor, and even doublets and contradictions that derive, apparently, from multiple sources and traditions."⁶ Bar-Efrat continues by saying that his commentary will focus on interpreting the final product of the redactor, since the biblical text is what influenced society for millennia, and not its literary precursors. As for history, he notes that literary analysis cannot determine what, if anything, from the narrative is historically accurate.⁷

A related point is made by Jacob Licht, who notes three branches of biblical narrative: fiction, historical, and traditional (i.e., legends and myths). Fiction writers were free to invent characters, lands, incidents, and so forth. The authors of historical and traditional narratives, however, were limited by what they knew apropos of the material about which they wrote.

Licht then notes that, for the historian, the distinction between the latter two categories is important, but for the literary critic, the distinction is immaterial since both went about their work the same way.⁸

⁵ Alter 2019: 164–168. ⁶ Bar-Efrat 1996: 7. The translation is ours.

⁷ Other important literary treatments of Samuel are Gunn 1978 and Polzin 1993, but there are, of course, many others.

⁸ Licht 1978: 16.

Box: (cont.)

In other words, one cannot distinguish between history and legend on literary grounds, hence it is irrelevant to the literary critic. It is, however, of great importance to the historian.

We, of course, agree with Licht and Bar-Efrat. Our book seeks to extract the historical facts from the literary creation. And while we will utilize some literary tools, this will be in the service of source- and redaction-critical study, to assist us in revealing problems with the narrative flow, thus allowing us to determine where we have multiple sources or traditions.

**CONTRADICTORY INTRODUCTIONS 1: HOW DID SAUL
BECOME KING?**

In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites come to the prophet Samuel and tell him that his sons are not following his path, so they want him to appoint a king (Hebrew *melekh*) to rule over them like all other peoples. Samuel consults God, who reluctantly agrees to this request, though not without having Samuel warn the Israelites how badly the king will treat them.

In 1 Samuel 9, we are introduced to Saul, a young man from the tribe of Benjamin who goes in search of his father's donkeys. At one point, he turns to the city of Zuph, where a seer named Samuel can be found, to ask about the donkeys. Unbeknownst to Saul, God had already told Samuel the following (1 Sam. 9:16): "At this time tomorrow, I will send a man to you from the territory of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him ruler [Hebrew *nagid*] of My people Israel. He will deliver My people from the hands of the Philistines; for I have taken note of My people, their outcry has come to Me." Here God seems to have a positive view of the use of a king/ruler and claims to have heard the outcry of his suffering people, and has thus decided to appoint one for them.

In other words, it is presented as God's idea, as if in 1 Samuel 8 the people hadn't asked for a king explicitly, and God and Samuel hadn't already spoken about it and both taken offense. The story continues with Samuel privately anointing Saul as ruler and providing him with further instructions.

In the next story, beginning in 1 Samuel 10:17, Samuel calls a meeting in Mitzpeh, in which he again rebukes Israel for requesting a king but agrees to appoint one based on divination. First the tribe of Benjamin is chosen, then the Matrite family, and finally Saul, who is hiding behind some jugs. Samuel brings Saul out of hiding and appoints him king.

The careful reader cannot help but ask: Is this some kind of farce? In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel is using divination to find the new king, whereas in 1 Samuel 9, God already told Samuel it would be Saul; in fact, Samuel has already anointed him! Moreover, are Samuel and God in favor of appointing a king or not? First, it is the people's idea and Samuel and God are angry. Then, it is God's idea and Samuel is happy. Then, Samuel rebukes the people as if God is angry.

Looking at these problems, critical scholars have suggested that two different versions of how Saul became king were woven together here.⁹ In one story (1 Sam. 8, 10:17–27), Samuel, the current leader of Israel, is pressured to appoint a king, and, once God reluctantly agrees, this is accomplished at a meeting in Mitzpeh, where Saul is chosen through divination. In another story (1 Sam. 9–10:16), God decides that the Israelites should have a ruler to lead them in battle against the Philistines and tells a local seer named Samuel to anoint Saul when Saul appears in the town of Zuph the next day looking for his father's donkeys.

The two stories have different timelines for the appointment of Saul as king, different methods for his choosing, different places where it happens, different attitudes toward the appointment (positive vs. negative), and even different terms (*nagid* [ruler] vs. *melekh* [king]). But even this does not exhaust the biblical accounts for how Saul became ruler of Israel.

A THIRD SAUL INTRODUCTION. In 1 Samuel 11, we are told that Nahash, the king of Ammon, threatens the Israelite city of Jabesh-gilead, whose inhabitants beg their fellow Israelites for help. Upon returning

⁹ A classic discussion can be found in Wellhausen 1957: 47–254. See also Budde 1890: 169–177; Smith 1899: xiii–xx. One version or another of this view has remained dominant in biblical scholarship since then; see, for example, Halpern 2001: 16–18. Richard Elliott Friedman (1998: 206–210), in his reconstruction of what he calls the J text of Samuel, includes only the stories of the people asking for a king and the war with Ammon, skipping entirely the story of the lost donkeys, which he ostensibly attributes to the E text.

from a day of plowing with his oxen, Saul hears of what Nahash is doing, and, overcome with the spirit of God, leads the Israelites into war with Ammon, saving Jabesh-gilead.

In context, the story is strange: Why is the king of Israel plowing fields, and why do the people of Jabesh-gilead send messages to all of Israel and not one to the king? Admittedly, the text claims that “wicked people” express contempt for Saul and refuse to follow him (1 Sam. 10:27), but this hardly explains why he essentially functions as a non-king in this story. Moreover, even if some people object to him, if the Israelites had begged Samuel for a king and he appointed one who is literally head and shoulders above everyone else, how is it that *absolutely no one* seems to think of Saul as the king immediately after?

We seem to have here a third Saul-becomes-king story. It is actually quite similar to stories we find in the book of Judges, in which an outside enemy attacks or threatens Israel and a rank-and-file Israelite takes up the cudgel, gathering a citizens’ militia and routing the enemy. This one, however, ends in the leader becoming king.

COMBINING THE INTRODUCTIONS. The editor of the introduction-to-Saul complex needed to work hard to make these stories cohere. He did so by adding details to smooth out the seams, such as the odd claim that people refused to follow Saul (1 Sam. 10:27, 11:12) or Samuel’s suggestion to “renew the kingship” (1 Sam. 11:14) after the war against Ammon. These additions allow the Saul-as-judge story to follow the inauguration story (1 Sam. 10:24) and to end with another inauguration (1 Sam. 11:15) without posing an explicit contradiction. The editor’s desire to make the various introductions cohere may also be why the story of Saul finding his father’s donkey ends with Saul not telling anybody he was inaugurated as king (1 Sam. 10:16); it leaves room for the other inauguration stories. Nevertheless, the original contours of three separate Saul inauguration stories – one at Mitzpeh (the people ask for a king), one at Zuph (lost donkeys), and one at Gilgal (defending Jabesh-gilead, Judges-like version) – are clear.

THE INTRODUCTIONS DO NOT CONNECT TO THE CORE. None of these three Saul-becomes-king stories leads naturally into the account of Saul's battling the Philistines as told in 1 Samuel 13–14. This story begins with a character not mentioned in any introduction: Jonathan, the adult son of a middle-aged Saul, who strikes down the Philistine *netziv* (prefect?) in Geba. Father and son then defeat the Philistines in the battle of Michmas, freeing the Israelites from the – according to the Bible – tyrannical dominance of the Philistines. How are we to understand the disconnect between the various introductions to Saul and this story about his reign?

As Sara Milstein, a Bible scholar at the University of British Columbia, has shown, ancient scribes often revised inherited stories through new introductions, sometimes cutting the original opening and sometimes adding an introduction where none existed before.¹⁰ This seems to be the case here.

The core Saul story narrates his triumph at the battle of Michmas and the valiance of his son Jonathan, and it concludes with the battle of Gilboa, also against the Philistines, during which Saul and Jonathan (and his other sons) are killed and their bodies hung on the walls of Beth-Shean.¹¹ To this core, argues Jacob Wright of Emory University, was appended the introduction about Saul saving Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites, which may have been inspired by the ending of the narrative, according to which the Jabesh-gileadites remove the bodies of Saul and his sons from the walls and bury them.¹² Saul's connection to the Jabesh-gileadites, from being their savior to their act of postmortem loyalty, thus bookends what Wright calls the History of Saul's Reign (HSR), one of two independent narratives that form the core of the book of Samuel.¹³

¹⁰ Milstein 2016, with many examples.

¹¹ This does not mean that every verse in 1 Samuel 13–14 is part of the original layer; like all biblical texts, here too later scribes made adjustments. Nevertheless, the story overall, including many of the details, makes up part of the oldest layer of the Saul account.

¹² Wright 2014.

¹³ The other, often referred to in scholarship as the History of David's Rise/Reign (HDR), will be discussed later in this chapter.

CONTRADICTORY INTRODUCTIONS 2: MEETING DAVID

In 1 Samuel 15, God commands Saul through Samuel to destroy the Amalekites, putting every one of them, including the animals, to the sword. Saul complies but spares the life of the king and allows the Israelites to take the best animals as booty. God is furious and tells Samuel that he has rejected Saul as king.

As a result, in 1 Samuel 16, Samuel is told to go to Bethlehem in Judah and anoint the son of Jesse as the next king. Finding that Jesse has eight sons, Samuel goes through all until he comes to the youngest, David, and, hearing from God that this is the intended person, anoints him king. This story has no follow-up in the book of Samuel and is never referenced or acknowledged in any of the later stories, including the very next story, which also introduces David.

DAVID MEETS SAUL. 1 Samuel 16:14 describes how the spirit of God leaves Saul, in whose place comes an evil spirit of melancholy. Saul's servants suggest that he use a court musician to play soothing music and calm his nerves. Saul likes the idea and asks where he can find a good lyre player, and one of his young men has the perfect guy (v. 18): "I have observed a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilled in music; he is a stalwart fellow and a warrior, sensible in speech, and handsome in appearance, and the LORD is with him." Saul then calls for David and makes him his arms bearer, and David would play whenever Saul was struck by a foul mood.

While the two stories do not contradict exactly, since Saul could have hired David without knowing about the anointing, they do not read well together. In the first, David is a boy; in the second, he is a military man. In the first, he is so unimpressive on the outside that his own father doesn't even think of him, and Samuel is surprised that he is the one. In the second, David is well known as a multitalented rising star. While we could read the second as taking place later in time, the story about hiring a musician follows logically upon God's disapproval of Saul and his loss of the divine spirit. While this second story is in some tension with the first, it is totally irreconcilable with the story that comes next, in which David is introduced to Saul again "for the first time."

DAVID MEETS SAUL (AGAIN). 1 Samuel 17 tells how an enormous Philistine named Goliath challenges the Israelites to send a champion to fight him one on one, and Saul and his army don't know what to do. Then we are told: "David was the son of a certain Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah whose name was Jesse. He had eight sons, and in the days of Saul the man was already old, advanced in years. The three oldest sons of Jesse had left and gone with Saul to the war." We are then given their names and informed that David was the youngest, and that he "went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem."

The text writes as if introducing David for the first time, while we actually know most of this information about David's family and hometown from the first introduction of David in 1 Samuel 16. The tension with the second introduction of David, as the king's arms-bearer and court musician, is even thicker.

Why is David coming from Bethlehem and visiting his brothers in the army? Shouldn't he be at Saul's side as per the second introduction of David? The passage anticipates this problem by saying that "he went back and forth," but this seems like a late editorial clean-up job.¹⁴ Moreover, David is described here as a young man, not old enough to fight in the military. He is not therefore "a powerful man of war," as Saul's young men described him. This is made especially clear when David approaches Saul offering to fight Goliath (v. 33): "But Saul said to David, 'You cannot go to that Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy.'"

Once David convinces Saul to let him fight, Goliath has the same reaction (v. 42): "When the Philistine caught sight of David, he scorned him, for he was but a boy, ruddy and handsome."

More significantly, if David indeed serves as Saul's arms-bearer and court musician, how is it that Saul and his general, Abner, seem to have no idea who he is? This is clear from the description of Saul watching the battle with Goliath unfold later in the story (1 Sam. 17:55–58):

When Saul saw David going out to assault the Philistine, he asked his army commander Abner, "Whose son is that boy, Abner?" And Abner replied,

¹⁴ The story ends in 1 Samuel 18:2, with Saul so impressed with David that he decides to take David home to live with him, which is in some tension with 1 Samuel 16:22, according to which David already lives with Saul.

“By your life, Your Majesty, I do not know.” . . . When David returned after killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him to Saul . . . Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, my boy?” And David answered, “The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”¹⁵

We must assume here that the introductory stories about David, like the introductory stories about Saul, were written independently of each other and the compiler or editor of the introducing-David complex did not smooth them out entirely.

Two Parallel David and Saul Sagas: A Look at Some Doublets

The introductions of David to Saul lead to the Saul-and-David saga, which describes the fall of the former and the rise of the latter. In this saga, it isn’t merely the introductions that are doubled, but doublets – that is, two or more versions of what seems to be the same story – appear continuously throughout the narrative. Already in his *Prolegomena*, Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), a towering figure in source criticism, suggested that at least two strands exist of David accounts.¹⁶ Along similar lines, Moshe Garsiel, a Bar-Ilan University Bible professor who focuses on the study of narratives, also sees two ancient sources. The first, written in the early Solomonic period, is David’s story, written from a pro-David and pro-monarchic perspective. The second, written in the later Solomonic period, questions monarchy and includes the accounts of Samuel and Saul more fully.¹⁷

¹⁵ The problem is even worse than this, since Saul and Abner not knowing David causes an internal tension with 1 Samuel 17:30–39, in which David convinces Saul to allow him to fight Goliath. Did Saul just forget that conversation? Another, more subtle tension is that in 1 Samuel 17:12, David lives with his father in Bethlehem, and yet, after he kills Goliath, he brings Goliath’s head and armor back to his (i.e., David’s) home in Jerusalem (17:54). Notably, many of these contradictions do not exist in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the text, which has a shorter narrative. Thus many scholars have suggested that the LXX version is the core, and that the contradictory elements represent either a separate account that has been spliced in or a later supplementary layer. See the discussion in Barthélemy et al. 1986. For an attempt to read each version holistically, see Johnson 2015. For an attempt to read the whole text (with the exception of 17:15) as a holistic unit, see Polak 1999: 372–374.

¹⁶ Wellhausen 1957: 245–262.

¹⁷ Garsiel 2018: 39–41. He includes two further stages, an expansion during transmission among scribes, and finally a Deuteronomistic redaction.

A less rigid model is that of Baruch Halpern, an influential biblical historian who refers to these two narrative strains simply as A and B, arguing that they derive from two alternative versions of the saga penned by different authors.¹⁸ Our approach has much overlap with Halpern's.

Often these doublets are attempts to explain one narrative theme common to both. For example, why does Saul hate David? In one version (1 Sam. 18:6–8), it is because when David returns successful from a battle with the Philistines, women come out with drums and dances, singing about how “Saul killed thousands and David tens of thousands.” Saul becomes jealous of David, who is granted the higher number, and subsequently hates him. This connects well to the Goliath introduction, according to which David begins his career showing up Saul by killing the giant.

In another version (1 Sam. 18:10–13), an evil spirit overcomes Saul while David is playing music, and Saul throws his spear at him, nearly killing him. Saul keeps trying to kill David after this, but finding himself unable to do so, he understands that God is with David.¹⁹ Angry and jealous, Saul removes David from his position as the court musician and puts him in command of troops, hoping he will be killed. This fits well with the introduction of David as the court musician and explains why Saul hates him (evil spirit) as well as how David moves from musician to warrior.

Other doublets in the Saul-and-David saga are:

- **Saul Sins and Loses the Monarchy.** Twice Saul sins and the prophet Samuel tells him that God has rejected him and his dynasty – once when he made a sacrifice at Gilgal without waiting seven days for Samuel to appear (1 Sam. 13:13–14), and once when he spared the life of Agog, the king of Amalek, and allowed the Israelites to keep some of the animals (1 Sam. 15).

¹⁸ Space limitations prevent us from elaborating. For a schematic look at how Halpern divides the Saul-and-David saga into sources A and B, see Halpern 2001: 277–279.

¹⁹ In fact, twice an evil spirit overtakes Saul and Saul throws a spear at David while David is playing music (1 Sam. 18:10–12, 19:9–10), but this probably does not reflect multiple traditions, but rather what scholars call a resumptive repetition – that is, when outside or tangential material is introduced into a text – in this case, material from another source – and the scribe wishes to bring the reader back to where the story left off (see more in Chapter 15, when we discuss 1 Kgs. 9:15–19).

- **David and Saul's Daughter.** Saul offers his daughter Merav to David, and David responds with, "I am not worthy" (1 Sam. 18:17–19). Saul offers his daughter Michal to David, and David responds with, "I am not worthy" (1 Sam. 18:20–28).
- **Saul's Children Love David.** Saul's son Jonathan loves David (1 Sam. 18:2–4, 19:1–7; 2 Sam. 1:26) and saves him from Saul (1 Sam. 20:1–21:1, 23:16–18). Saul's daughter Michal loves David (1 Sam. 18:20) and saves him from Saul (1 Sam. 19:11–18).
- **Jonathan Pleads for David.** Twice Jonathan tries to convince his father that David is not an enemy; once he succeeds in the short term (1 Sam. 19:4–7), and once Saul gets so angry he throws a spear at his own son (1 Sam. 20:32–33).
- **Saul among the Prophets.** Twice Saul is overcome by prophecy, rolling on the floor ecstatic, and the people watching ask, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:11–12, 19:24).
- **Telling Saul about David's Hideout.** Twice the people of Ziph tell Saul that David is hiding from him in the Judean wilderness (1 Sam. 23:19, 26:1).
- **Saul Pursues David.** Twice Saul pursues David into remote parts of Judah, and David has the opportunity to kill him but does not. When David announces this to Saul, the latter feels remorse and says, "Is that your voice, David my son?" (compare 1 Sam. 24 and 1 Sam. 26).
- **Escaping to Gath.** Twice David runs to Achish, the Philistine king of Gath, to be under his protection from Saul. Once David is recognized as the great Israelite general who killed so many Philistines, and David survives by pretending to be crazy and drooling into his beard (1 Sam. 21:11–16); the other time, Achish simply accepts him as a client and gives him the city of Ziklag (1 Sam. 27).

It is always possible that these doublets were included because they both occurred, or because the author of Samuel liked to write this way. Nevertheless, when combined with what we saw earlier, that Samuel contains multiple contradictory accounts of Saul's coronation and David's introduction to Saul, it seems reasonable to suggest that the doublets represent the continuation of these respective stories, and that more than one author

wrote a Saul-and-David saga that a later editor supplemented and combined into what we now call the book of Samuel.

The Core Story of the Rise of David

The introductions to David, including the doublets, explain how he became connected to Saul and then how their connection broke. Like the Saul introductions, this has the appearance of an artificial bridge, moving from Saul's core narrative – his war with the Philistines – to the core narrative of pre-monarchic David, for which Jacob Wright uses the name coined by German Bible scholar Leonhard Rost, the History of David's Rise (HDR).²⁰ This account relates the escapades of David and his band of warriors, who wander the Judean hill country and the Negev, making petty raids against nearby tribes and offering real protection for Israelite villages from incursions, and perhaps also as mafia-style protection from himself.

This is the background, for instance, of the story of Nabal the Carmelite (1 Sam. 25), whose shepherds receive the services of David's armed men. At one point, when David thinks payment is in order, he sends the following message (1 Sam. 25:6–8):

To life! Greetings to you and to your household and to all that is yours!
I hear that you are now doing your shearing. As you know, your shepherds have been with us; we did not harm them, and nothing of theirs was missing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. So receive these young men graciously, for we have come on a festive occasion. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can.

Nabal responds by insulting David, even though his own men beg him to pay. When David receives the message, he has his forces march toward Nabal's house to wipe him out. The slaughter is avoided only when Nabal's wife, Abigail, realizing that her husband is condemning them all to death by picking a fight with a warlord, brings David a large gift and apologizes.

Other stories of the pre-monarchic HDR describe David's raids in various parts of the Negev (1 Sam. 27) and his defense of Ziklag after it

²⁰ Rost 1982 (originally published in 1926).

was plundered by Amalekites, who take all their wives and daughters captive (1 Sam. 30). David and his men chase the Amalekites down and slaughter them, reclaiming their own people as well as all the booty these Amalekite raiders had taken from other places. David then sends the extra booty as a gift to the elders of Judah.

Another part of this core story is likely preserved at the end of Samuel – a sort of appendix with a potpourri of stories, lists, and prayers either cut from one of the older accounts or added from some other source. Here we find a description of battles David fought against the Philistines along with his best warriors. The text never says when these took place, but they apparently occur early in his career (2 Sam. 21:15–22, 23:8–17), either soon before or soon after he becomes king of the south. In addition, the schematic description of the early part of David's rule – that is, the conquest of Jerusalem, his vanquishing of the Philistines, and his wars against Ammon, Moab, and Edom, may be part of the HDR.²¹

In this account, which lacks the introductory material about how David met Saul, David becomes king of Judah after Saul and his family are killed in battle; no personal connection to Saul is marshaled to explain this move. Only the Saul-and-David sagas emphasize this connection, for reasons we will explore later in this chapter.

Once the stories about Saul and David's deep connection were added to the core narrative, the text was forced to explain why someone who was the court musician, star warrior, and even the son-in-law of King Saul is wandering around in the wilderness fighting petty battles against nomads and collecting protection money from locals. This leads to the depiction of David's time in Judah as characterized essentially by the need to remain aloof from Saul.

The core HDR narrative, however, needs no such explanation. Instead, David's behavior can be understood easily: He is a local phenomenon who rises in power as a brigand leader. Given his leadership

²¹ Much of 2 Samuel, from chapters 11–20, is part of what scholars call the succession narrative (see later in this chapter), which is filled with family drama and court intrigue. It is very different in narrative style to the schematic conquest accounts that cap the HDR.

qualities and his status as a younger son who is not likely to inherit land, this was an understandable option.

In fact, it is highly reminiscent of what we find in the stories of Abimelech (Judg. 8:30–31, 9:1–6) and Jephthah (Judg. 11:1–3), according to which younger or rejected sons become the leaders of brigand groups. The latter is especially apt (Judg. 11:1–3):

Jephthah the Gileadite was an able warrior, who was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah's father was Gilead; but Gilead also had sons by his wife, and when the wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out . . . Jephthah fled from his brothers . . . Men of low character gathered about Jephthah and went out raiding with him.

Wright reconstructs the opening of HDR in a way quite similar to this (1 Sam. 17:12a, 14a, 22:2):

David was the son of a certain Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah whose name was Jesse. He had eight sons . . . and David was the youngest . . . Everyone who was in straits and everyone who was in debt and everyone who was desperate joined him, and he became their leader; there were about four hundred men with him.²²

In the core story, therefore, David is the youngest son, who, like Jephthah and Abimelech, breaks out on his own, in the wilderness outside his hometown, and prospers.

In sum, the editor of Samuel, working with core blocks of text about Saul and David, combined these with two distinct Saul and David sagas, each of which attempts to explain David's connection to Saul on one side and how David ended up wandering in the wilderness as an outlaw on the other.

Solomon the Wise and Solomon the Sinful

The literary development of Solomon's story seems less complex than those of Saul's and David's.²³ First, other than a brief mention of his birth, Solomon is not mentioned in the book of Samuel, and he plays no role in the dramatic stories of what many scholars call the Court History, which

²² Wright 2014: 37. ²³ A good description is Halpern 1988: 144–180.

deals with the rape of Tamar and Absalom's rebellion.²⁴ Nevertheless, Solomon's future existence is foreshadowed – and mocked – at the beginning of the Court Narrative, in the story of David stealing Bathsheba away from his neighbor and loyal soldier, Uriah the Hittite. Yet Solomon is the dominant figure among David's sons in the book of Kings.

INTRODUCTION: DEFENDING SOLOMON'S ACQUISITION OF THE THRONE.

Kings opens with David's ostensibly oldest (surviving) son, Adonijah, believing he would be his father's successor. Adonijah is supported by the powerful general Joab and the high priest Abiathar, not to mention his brothers. Nevertheless, upon his deathbed, with only the prophet Nathan and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, around, David proclaims that Solomon will be the heir as he had promised Bathsheba previously. Therefore, the text seems to suggest, Solomon was in the right in killing Joab, his father's loyal general, and his own brother Adonijah, and throwing the priest Abiathar out of Jerusalem, three acts that could otherwise be seen as callous and unethical.

David's deathbed message further supports the killing of Joab because of his murder of Abner and Amasa. David also commands the killing of Shimei ben Gerah, a relation of Saul's, for cursing him. Thus Solomon's acts are presented not as calculated moves to protect his position but as continuing David's legacy by taking care of his father's unfinished business.

The opening two chapters of Kings complete what scholars call the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 11–20; 1 Kgs. 1–2), which narrates the family drama in David's court that leads to the coronation of Solomon.²⁵ The Succession Narrative connects the books of Samuel and Kings by explaining why a younger son of David from a later wife

²⁴ The Court History or Court Narrative is part of what scholars have called the Succession History/Narrative, and some believe it was once independent of this framing. For a discussion, see Flanagan 1972. In contrast, Fokkelman (1981–93: 2:3) rejects the attempt to isolate this unit from the previous unit as a misguided "pigeonhole mentality."

²⁵ Many believe that this narrative constitutes its own source. See, for example, Rost 1982; McKenzie 2000: 176–180; Halpern 2001: 391–406.

ends up inheriting the throne and acting ruthlessly to clinch his position.²⁶

Kings then continues for another nine chapters with an account of Solomon's reign. Like the accounts of Saul and David in Samuel, the description of Solomon contains conflicting evaluations of his rule, though without contradictory openings and largely without doublets. In essence, we have the following two pictures.

WISE AND SUCCESSFUL (KINGS 3–10). The first picture of Solomon, what we might call the core account, is largely positive. Solomon marries the daughter of the pharaoh, a highly prestigious match (1 Kgs. 3:1). He loves YHWH and prays for wisdom, which YHWH grants in abundance (1 Kgs. 3, 5:9–14, 10:1–13, 23–25). Solomon puts together a larger staff than his father and divides his territory into districts with prefects for smoother administration (1 Kgs. 4). His kingdom is huge, from Egypt in the southwest to the Euphrates in the northeast, and his palace expenditures are like proportioned.

He contacts his neighbor to the north, Hiram of Tyre, for help with the massive project of building his palace and the Temple in Jerusalem, which takes years and costs a fortune (1 Kgs. 6–7). Solomon offers a great prayer upon completing the Temple and God responds positively (1 Kgs. 8–9:14).²⁷

Solomon also builds up other cities in Israel (1 Kgs. 9:15–19), including the construction of a port at Etzion-geber, all paid for by taxes (1 Kgs. 9:26–28), and incorporates all of the remaining Canaanite enclaves into his kingdom (1 Kgs. 9:20–22). Solomon is also said to have had an amazing collection of luxury items made of gold and ivory (1 Kgs. 10:14–22), and to have been involved in high-end trading of horses and chariots (1 Kgs. 10:26–29).

Admittedly, even this description of a successful Solomon has rough patches. Early on, the text notes that in his day, people, including

²⁶ Many see the Succession Narrative as a later graft onto the Solomon story, which works with the principle discussed earlier in this chapter – that introductions are often added secondarily to core narratives.

²⁷ This section is heavily Deuteronomistic (we will discuss the significance of whether a text is Deuteronomistic later in the chapter).

Solomon himself, still worshipped at high places (1 Kgs. 3:2–3).²⁸ More than once it is emphasized that Solomon lays a heavy tax burden on the Israelites (1 Kgs. 5:27–30, 9:23), and some of the over-the-top description of his wealth may convey a kind of gluttony (1 Kgs. 5:2–3, 6–8, 10:14–29). The fact that the palace complex is much larger and more elaborate than the Temple, and takes much longer to complete, is likely a veiled criticism. Finally, Solomon overextends his building projects and is forced to give some Israelite cities to the king of Tyre (1 Kgs. 9:10–13).²⁹

Nevertheless, even these descriptions avoid negative language about Solomon, and the overall tenor of this section is quite positive. The presentation of Solomon is in mythic form, as a larger-than-life figure who accomplished great things. A couple of summary statements from this section make this point clear:

“Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea; they ate and drank and were content.” (1 Kgs. 4:20)

“Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.” (1 Kgs. 5:5)³⁰

The story in 1 Kings 11, however, has a rather different flavor.

SOLOMON THE SINNER. 1 Kings 11 opens with (vv. 1–5):

King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh’s daughter – Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite women, from the nations of which the LORD had said to the Israelites, “None of you shall join them and none of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods.” . . . In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon’s heart

²⁸ This is a classic editorial gloss by the Deuteronomist, who felt the need to explain how Solomon (in the next verse) offered sacrifices in Gibeon.

²⁹ This act so bothered the writer of the book of Chronicles – a work that rewrites the history in Samuel and Kings to make it more religiously acceptable to the author – that it reverses the story (2 Chr. 8:2).

³⁰ Some scholars note that the description of Israel as “from Dan to Beersheba” contradicts the larger borders of “from the Euphrates to Egypt.” While this could be an example of an ideological gap about borders, such as we see in the Pentateuch, here it could simply be the difference between where the Israelites themselves lived (Dan to Beersheba) and where the Israelite king ruled (whether in reality or in the author’s imagination) as an emperor.

after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD his God as his father David had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

Solomon even builds shrines for these foreign deities (vv. 7–8). God then reacts angrily to Solomon’s religious perfidy (vv. 9–10) and tells Solomon (vv. 11–13):

Because you are guilty of this, you have not kept My covenant and the laws which I enjoined upon you, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. But, for the sake of your father David, I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it away from your son. However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give your son one tribe.

We are then told that a number of rebellions take place against Solomon. Hadad the Edomite, supported by the pharaoh himself (vv. 14–22), Rezon of Damascus (vv. 23–25), and, most importantly, Jeroboam of Ephraim (vv. 26–40).

While the text can be read as chronological instead of contradictory – that is, Solomon begins as righteous and deteriorates over time – rhetorically speaking, the text presents us with two conflicting evaluations of his reign: Solomon the righteous, the successful ruler of a large kingdom, and Solomon the sinful, plagued with rebellion on all sides.

The Dissolution of the United Monarchy: Two Versions

Each of the contrasting accounts of Solomon’s reign leads to a contrasting explanation of the revolt of the northern tribes. Here we encounter another case of multiple introductory doublets.

In one story, the Israelites approach Solomon’s son Rehoboam, complaining that his father had been too harsh on them. Rehoboam reacts with his famous “my father flogged you with whips, but I will flog you with scorpions” (1 Kgs. 12:14) and the Israelites declare (v. 16) “We have no portion in David, No share in Jesse’s son! To your tents, O Israel! Now look to your own House, O David.”³¹

³¹ These words of secession are the same words Sheba ben Bichri uses in 2 Samuel 20:1 in reaction to David’s preferential treatment of the Judahites over the Israelites,

The text continues by describing the immediate consequences of this declaration (1 Kgs. 12:16–19):

So the Israelites returned to their homes. But Rehoboam continued to reign over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah. King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the forced labor, but all Israel pelted him to death with stones. Thereupon King Rehoboam hurriedly mounted his chariot and fled to Jerusalem. Thus, Israel revolted against the House of David, as is still the case.

This story explains that the United Monarchy breaks up after the death of Solomon because of Rehoboam's inability to read the situation properly.

An alternate version tells the story of the founding father of the Northern Kingdom, the Ephraimite Jeroboam ben Nebat. It begins in 1 Kings 11:26 – that is, in the section about Solomon the sinner – with Jeroboam raising his hand against Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:28–32):

This Jeroboam was an able man, and when Solomon saw that the young man was a capable worker, he appointed him over all the forced labor of the House of Joseph. During that time, Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem and the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the way. He had put on a new robe; and when the two were alone . . . Ahijah took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. "Take ten pieces," he said to Jeroboam. "For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands, and I will give you ten tribes."

Ahijah continues by laying out the sins of Solomon and the Israelites (11:33–39) as described in the beginning of 1 Kings 11.

Apparently, Solomon hears about this (11:40): "Solomon sought to put Jeroboam to death, but Jeroboam promptly fled to King Shishak of Egypt; and he remained in Egypt till the death of Solomon."

The culmination of this story appears in 1 Kings 12:2–3a and 20 (following the text as it appears in the Greek Septuagint version): "And Solomon slept with his fathers . . . when Jeroboam son of Nabat heard – and he was still in Egypt, since he fled from before Solomon and settled in Egypt – he

highlighting a tension that already exists in David's time, before finally exploding after Rehoboam's response.

went straight and came to his city in the land of Sarira which is in the hill country of Ephraim.”

According to this, Jeroboam, who had been hiding out in Egypt, hears that Solomon died and returns home. This leads nicely into verse 20: “When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent messengers and summoned him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the House of David.” Thus all takes place as Ahijah the Shilonite had predicted.

We have another doublet here explaining why Israel breaks off from Judah: In one version, the Israelites secede because the righteous and competent Solomon has a foolish son, Rehoboam, who angers the Israelites, destroying what his father created. Think of the verse in Ecclesiastes, a book that tradition (apocryphally) ascribes to Solomon (Eccl. 2:18–19):

So, too, I loathed all the wealth that I was gaining under the sun. For I shall leave it to the man who will succeed me, and who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? And he will control all the wealth that I gained by toil and wisdom under the sun. That too is futile.

Generations of traditional readers could not help seeing this as envisioning what Rehoboam does to his father’s kingdom. In this story, the people as a whole, not Jeroboam, instigate the rebellion.³²

The other version envisions a sinful Solomon, steeped in idolatry, whose kingdom will be torn from him in the time of his son. As happened with David, once God decides to end someone’s dynasty, a prophet is sent to appoint a successor, in this case, Ahijah of Shiloh appoints Jeroboam. Once Solomon dies, Jeroboam simply returns to Israel and is anointed king in keeping with God’s promise and Ahijah’s message.

Although we do not have a clear set of doublets for the Solomon story, we do have a long, (mostly) positive thread that ends with Rehoboam angering the northern tribes, bringing about a rebellion, and a shorter negative thread that ends with the Israelites appointing Jeroboam their king after Solomon’s

³² In fact, a close look at the story shows that Jeroboam, who ostensibly functions as Israel’s spokesman, is included in the rebellion story artificially and is likely a later add-on.

death. While this is less complex and entangled than the literary history of the Saul-and-David accounts, it is still not a straightforward “history.”

A HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF THE UNITED MONARCHY LITERARY COMPLEX

How is one to historically evaluate these accounts? Certainly, as we have shown, it is impossible to take these accounts at face value: They contain contradictions and doublets, and have clearly been supplemented over time. Nevertheless, discounting them entirely as historical sources would be a mistake, since accounts such as these may contain large amounts of historical information.

Let us illustrate this point with a classic example of a narrative with multiple contradictory sources and doublets whose basic storyline turns out to be factually correct: the biblical account of King Sennacherib of Assyria’s campaign against Judah in the time of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 18:13–19:37). Here, the book of Kings offers three different explanations for why Sennacherib failed to take Jerusalem:

- (a) Hezekiah pays him to leave Jerusalem standing (i.e., he practically surrenders and pays heavy tribute) (18:14–16).
- (b) King Tirhaka (Taharqa) of Egypt sends an army to support Judah (19:8–9).
- (c) A plague strikes Sennacherib’s camp during the siege (19:35–36).

Given these contradictory explanations, we might be tempted to discount the entire story as mythic. Perhaps this would have been scholarship’s evaluation of it if Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 BCE hadn’t been supported by a massive amount of archaeological and historical evidence.³³ In fact, Sennacherib’s own official account of the war, written in Akkadian and preserved on a prism in cuneiform script, indirectly confirms the first explanation, that Assyria

³³ The evidence includes, for example, Sennacherib’s prism, which supplies a wealth of information about the campaign from an Assyrian perspective; Assyrian pictorial reliefs depicting the siege and destruction of Lachish; destruction layers in multiple Judahite cities; the Assyrian siege ramp excavated more or less intact in front of Lachish; and more.

abandoned the siege of Jerusalem in return for a massive payoff from King Hezekiah.³⁴

This example, one of many, highlights how just because a story has contradictory doublets does not mean that it doesn't have a historical core. Ancient scribes had a tendency to rewrite historical events in ways that worked better with their political or religious views, but they often maintained the skeletal structure of the event they were retelling, and even any number of factual details. This, of course, begs the difficult question: How are we to determine whether a given narrative has historical elements?

Putting aside the issue of corroborative or contradictory archaeological evidence (this will be dealt with extensively later in the book), biblical scholars work backward from the texts, trying to determine when and why they were written, and what can be deduced from comparing the alternative versions. Let us begin with the book of Samuel and its literary history.

Relative and Absolute Dating

In the first part of this chapter, we reconstructed the development of the Saul–David complex in the book of Samuel. At its core lies the successive, independent accounts of two early Israelite heroes who became kings, Saul and then David, to which were added two sets of Saul–David narrative sagas. Considering the similarity of these sagas, one of the doublet sagas was likely aware of the other and was responding to it in some way by composing an alternative. We can therefore suggest that the story developed in stages:

- First, the core Saul and David complexes were composed either together or independently and soon combined.
- Second, one of the Saul–David sagas (the one beginning with Saul searching for his father's donkeys) was composed either as a supplement or independently and later added.

³⁴ The prism is discussed from multiple angles in Grabbe 2003. Notably, biblical-critical methodology points independently to a preference for the first explanation as well. Like the accounts of Saul and David analyzed earlier in this chapter, the story here comes from multiple sources, and the payoff is part of the core text, written in a more prosaic style, short and without heavy literary flourishes. It may even derive from palace archival information explaining what happened to the gold. The other two explanations, although likely containing some historical information as well, were written for polemical or theological purposes and need to be evaluated in that light.

- Third, the other Saul–David saga (the one beginning with people asking for a king and Samuel rebuking them) was composed either as a supplement or independently, as a competitor with the first saga, and then added.³⁵

This brings us to the question of dating. When were these texts composed? Here it is important to underscore the difference between relative dating and absolute dating. The literary analysis offered previously argues for the text being written in stages, but this says only which is earlier and which is later in sequence. It does not tell us when each was written.

In theory, all of these layers could have been composed at any point during or after the lives of the protagonists (assuming they existed), in the First Temple period or even the Second Temple period. How is one to narrow the options? One important literary consideration for dating the book has to do with the general history of the Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings complex.

DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY. In his two volume *Contributions towards an Introduction to the Old Testament* published in 1806–7 (in German), Bible scholar Wilhelm M. L. de Wette (1780–1849) showed how Deuteronomy must have begun as an independent work and that we can identify it with the Torah scroll discovered in the Temple and presented to King Josiah early in his reign (2 Kgs. 22). Since that time, dating Deuteronomy to the seventh century has been one of the cornerstones of Pentateuchal scholarship.³⁶

When, in 1943, another German Bible scholar, Martin Noth (1902–68), argued that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings make up a single history framed by the theology of the book of Deuteronomy, it was taken for granted that the compilation of the Deuteronomistic History itself could not predate the seventh century.³⁷

³⁵ This is presented as later than the donkey story layer since in this story, Samuel is presented not simply as a local seer but as the leader of all Israel, which is the worldview of the scribe ultimately responsible for the “larger” book of Samuel.

³⁶ The readers are referred to Richard Elliott Friedman’s 1987 bestseller for a vivid description.

³⁷ See, in English, Noth 1981. See also Collins 2019.

Some contemporary scholars debate Noth's thesis, but even among those who accept it, most recognize that the Deuteronomistic History is not of a piece.³⁸ In other words, the author or authors did not simply compose these four volumes from scratch but worked with earlier sources. Moreover, the amount of "Deuteronomy-ness" differs between the biblical books. Thus, while Joshua and Kings show signs of heavy Deuteronomistic editing, the book of Samuel shows relatively light signs of such editing.

One classically Deuteronomistic text in Samuel is Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 12, in which he offers a survey of Israelite history from Jacob descending to Egypt, through Moses and the Judges, and ends with an admonition to obey God or suffer the consequences (vv. 8–16).

This is a classically Deuteronomistic source in its theology, vocabulary, and emphasis on periodization of history.³⁹ While it is written to be continuous with the alternative Saul-and-David saga in which God gets angry about appointing a king, various details reveal it to be a later text composed by the final editor of the work.⁴⁰ Thus, the Deuteronomistic layer in Samuel postdates not only the core Saul-and-David accounts, but even both versions of the Saul-and-David saga.

While this demonstrates that the three main sources in Samuel about Saul and David must be earlier than the seventh century, when the first edition of the Deuteronomistic History was composed, it does not tell us how early the sources date, nor how far apart from each other they were composed, nor whether the texts have any basis in historical fact (more on the dating of texts, see box "Biblical Hebrew as a Dating Tool"). In order to answer these questions, we have to take another look at the texts with these questions in mind.

³⁸ See, for instance, Römer 2005.

³⁹ The same is true for the opening of the Solomon-as-sinner story and God's message to Solomon. While an older pre-Deuteronomistic core may lie behind this version of the account of Solomon and Jeroboam's revolt, because of the heavy Deuteronomistic editing of Kings, it is difficult to isolate.

⁴⁰ For example, while it mentions the Israelites asking for a king (the introduction in 1 Samuel 8), it says they did so in response to the threat of Nahash the Ammonite (the introduction in 1 Samuel 11), creating interconnections between sources to smooth over the narrative. Moreover, while Samuel is ostensibly the speaker, he refers to himself in the third person, which is very unusual for the book of Samuel.

Box: Biblical Hebrew as a Dating Tool

It is generally accepted that biblical Hebrew – the language in which the biblical corpus was written – can be divided into a number of literary styles reflecting several levels of development.⁴¹ A widely used model for dividing up the history of biblical Hebrew into periods is as follows:⁴²

1. Archaic Biblical Hebrew, primarily found in poems. This style should be dated to the pre-monarchic period.
2. Classical (or Standard) Biblical Hebrew (CBH). This style should be dated to the period of the monarchy, often attributed to the tenth–seventh centuries.
3. Transitional Biblical Hebrew (TBH). This style should be dated to the sixth century (the time of the events surrounding the end of the monarchic period in Judah and the exile).
4. Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH). This style should be dated to the Persian period.

These layers are characterized by their style and can be identified by the systematic use of certain terms, phrases, and grammatical structures.

Scholarship has focused mainly on the distinction between CBH and LBH, since it is crucial for the dating of a very large segment of the biblical literature. The determination of the style is not established by an occasional use of a single word or a phrase. An author from an early period could use a rare synonym for the sake of assonance or dramatic effect, or just as an idiosyncrasy, while a later author could use an older term or form – this is called archaizing – as poetic language, for stylistic reasons, or even just randomly.

⁴¹ Hurvitz (2001: 34) notes that the nineteenth-century Semitists and Hebraists already determined this on linguistic grounds and contemporary scholarship builds on these insights.

⁴² See Hurvitz (2001: 35); Fassberg (2011); Hendel and Joosten (2018). The transitional stage is discussed in the latter two studies.

Box: (cont.)

To determine whether a given linguistic feature is really LBH, for instance, Avi Hurvitz, the renowned Hebrew language scholar, looks to three criteria:

1. The word or feature is common in biblical works that we know without doubt must be from the Persian period or later. This helps avoid the circular-reasoning problem (i.e., declaring it to be from the Persian period because of these words and thus proving these words are from the Persian period).
2. The word/feature appears frequently in other, non-biblical texts from this period; this gives us a more objective frame of reference.
3. Classic Biblical Hebrew has other ways of saying the same thing. If this is the only way the Bible has of articulating this concept, its absence from other biblical texts could just be coincidence (i.e., these texts don't happen to speak about the idea expressed in these words, so there was no occasion to use them).⁴³

We need to demonstrate a combination of all three criteria to argue for the probability that a given text is written in LBH and that therefore it must be dated to the Persian period or later. The first criterion is the reason for identifying the text as LBH, the second demonstrates that the phenomenon is not an accidental feature of the biblical text but part and parcel of the linguistic norms of the later period, and the third shows that the lack of this linguistic feature in CBH texts is not an accident of a given discourse or topic never happening to have come up in the extant corpus of biblical CBH texts, but is an alternative way of expressing a given word, phrase, or idea.

The linguistic dating is much more “scientific” than other methods of dating texts, and the distinction between types of

⁴³ Hurvitz 2001: 37–38.

Box: (cont.)

Hebrew, and the correlation of these linguistic forms with chronological periods, became widely accepted among linguists and biblical scholars.⁴⁴ Still, the implications of this method for the dating of texts and even for understanding historical issues, brought linguistic dating into the spotlight and drew criticism.

Most of the debate revolved around the distinction between CBH and LBH. Thus, some scholars, while following the method's basic logic and accepting distinctions between linguistic layers, disputed the date range of each, especially the timing of the transition into LBH.⁴⁵

Other scholars, however, questioned the very distinction between the different layers. Starting in 1992, British Bible scholar Philip R. Davies challenged the cogency of this distinction.⁴⁶ While his argument was mostly impressionistic – that is, he did not engage the specific claims and proofs but rather the overall concept – several scholars over the past decades have tried to take on the model, most notably Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensverd.⁴⁷ Although a relatively small minority, the challenge to the chronological approach made quite a splash in scholarship, and symposia were held at conferences debating the question. Several books have been published pushing back on this skepticism, though, of course, these books were critiqued in turn by the other side.⁴⁸

Although the debate goes on, the majority of scholars, especially in the United States and Israel, remain convinced of the

⁴⁴ For a programmatic introduction, see Randall and Fassberg 2016.

⁴⁵ Talshir 2003; Levin 2006; and see also Ehrensverd 2006

⁴⁶ Davies 1992:102–105. See also Davies 2003.

⁴⁷ Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensverd 2008.

⁴⁸ Schniedewind 2013; Hendel and Joosten 2018. See also Rachmuth, Portnoy, and Wright 2022, who showed that the differences between CBH and LBH are statistically significant.

Box: (cont.)

developmental model outlined in this chapter, and this is all the more so among linguists.

We would go into more detail about the nature of the debate, and the reasons we find the developmental model on the whole to be more persuasive, but it would be a distraction since the distinction between CBH and LBH, which is the focus of this debate, has little connection to the argument in this book. It is widely accepted that the book of Samuel, which is written in CBH (with a little TBH), is part of the Deuteronomistic History, which was probably edited around the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE. Given the broad consensus about this, there is little reason to spend time demonstrating that the text is in CBH and therefore from the First Temple period.

Moreover, many scholars agree that much of the book of Samuel is “pre-Deuteronomistic” – that is, the texts, while edited in the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE, were actually composed earlier and are datable to anywhere within the monarchic period, writ large.

Our claim in this book, however, is more specific: We argue not only that the core material in the book of Samuel is pre-Deuteronomistic, but that it actually dates to the early monarchic period – that is, the tenth and ninth centuries BCE. As the distinction between CBH and LBH does not allow scholars to distinguish between a tenth/ninth-century text and a seventh-century text, demonstrating that Samuel is written in CBH, and that CBH is from the monarchic period, does little to move our argument forward vis-à-vis scholars who date the texts to a later point in this same period, to the eighth, seventh, or even the early sixth century.

This is why, in our book, we rely mostly on large-scale archaeological and historical reconstructions combined with historical details, archaeological correspondences, and speculative reconstructions of the political motivation behind the various narratives. Nevertheless, in the context of linguistic dating, we do think it is worth looking more closely at the work of Frank Polak of Tel Aviv

Box: (cont.)

University, who takes a sociolinguistic approach, a subspecialty within linguistics that also takes the social context of language and writing into account.

Polak's Sociolinguistic Approach and the Medial Corpus

Beyond specific words or phrases, Polak distinguishes between styles. Specifically relevant to our topic, Polak argues that there is a fundamental difference between texts based upon scribal or administrative precursors and texts based upon oral traditions. "The style characteristic of oral narratives is dominant in the stories of Abraham and Jacob, the stories of Samson, and the stories of Elisha. The stories of Samuel, Saul, and David were composed in a similar style (as well as the stories of Elijah)."⁴⁹

Elsewhere, Polak distinguishes the corpus with these stories – what he calls the Medial corpus (a term borrowed from the field of European literature) – from the Achaemenid (Persian period) and Judean (Deuteronomistic) corpora. Regarding the Medial, Polak writes:

What sets the Medial corpus apart from the Judean and Achaemenid texts is its preservation of many features that are characteristic of oral language and its multifaceted interaction with texts in writing ...⁵⁰ the lean, brisk style of the Medial corpus represents a period in which the oral literature was associated even with the highest classes and in which the royal bureaucracy was not yet widely developed ...⁵¹ The characteristics of this style with its short, mostly paratactic clauses are close to the cross-linguistic characteristics of spontaneous spoken language. Hence, this style suggests roots in oral narrative. In other words, the tales in the Medial corpus were committed to writing by people who had

⁴⁹ Polak 2011: 128. The translation is ours. ⁵⁰ Polak 2012: 303. ⁵¹ Polak 2012: 324.

Box: (cont.)

witnessed the oral performance of this tale by the narrator/singer or had intimate knowledge of the oral style and considered this style to be normative for literary discourse.⁵²

With regard to the stories in Samuel specifically, Polak adds another dimension, namely how it envisions the relative political (as opposed to military) weakness of its monarch: “The Samuel-Saul-David narratives present a royal authority that is weak and open to challenge (2 Samuel 19–20) and thus an inchoate kingdom rather than the full-blown monarchy portrayed in 2 Kings.”⁵³

Elsewhere, Polak makes the point more strongly:

[F]or the book of Samuel the inception of the monarchy is fraught with problems. The narrative world depicted here is far from glorious, and ... does not evoke an empire or even a regional power. On the contrary, kingship is from the outset threatened by failure, leads at first to almost total collapse under Saul, and even when eventually successful, with David, suffers from well nigh insuperable weaknesses.⁵⁴

While Polak’s argument does not specifically tie the early Saul-and-David stories to the tenth or the ninth century, it argues for the likelihood that these stories began as early, oral compositions in a time when the monarchy was not yet as politically powerful as it eventually became. This certainly fits with the time of David, or even the complicated period of Israel and Judah forging independent political identities upon the collapse of Solomon’s mini-empire.

While there were other times in the monarchic period in which kings were politically weak, Polak argues that many aspects of the Saul-and-David stories are not easily explained if the corpus was simply a Judean construct:

⁵² Polak 2012: 329. ⁵³ Polak 2012: 323. ⁵⁴ Polak 2015: 118.

Box: (cont.)

[S]ome of the basic details of the narrated world of the tales of Samuel, Saul and David defy explanation in terms of a Judahite context . . . The tales of Samuel, Saul and David came into being in a milieu in which all these items of memory still were alive. The reception of these narratives in the Judahite context has led to various redactorial activities, which enabled the literati in Jerusalem to integrate it into their own narrative world and make it palatable for the (post-)Josianic realm or Persian-era Yehud. But the basic narrative imagination was grounded in a socio-cultural context that preceded these periods by centuries.⁵⁵

For the most part, this is our view as well. While Polak bases his understanding primarily upon sociolinguistic features, and ours relies on archaeology and source/redaction criticism, the overall conclusions about early dating of the core (as opposed to the Deuteronomistic redaction) are in alignment. (The social and historical contexts of various stories, names, and practices will be discussed in other parts of the book, especially Chapter 15.)

A Consistent Overall Picture

The first thing to note is that even taking into account the many contradictions and doublets, the various sources making up the United Monarchy complex present a relatively coherent overall picture. Saul is the first king and fights with the Philistines. David, who is not directly related to Saul and comes from the south, takes over as king upon Saul's death, and is a successful warrior and conqueror. David's son Solomon rules after him and amasses great wealth, but early in his son Rehoboam's reign, the empire falls apart and the (much smaller) separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah are formed.

That conflicting versions of an account do not belie the overall picture of a story but confirm it is not always the case in biblical texts. For example, the various accounts of how the Israelites settled the land

⁵⁵ Polak 2015: 127–128.

present opposing pictures. On one hand, we have a description of *unified conquest* in Joshua 1–12, when all of the Israelite tribes, led by Joshua, conquer the entire country. Joshua 11:16–17 summarizes the process: “Joshua conquered the whole of this region . . . and he captured all the kings there and executed them.”

On the other hand, we have descriptions of *slow settlement*. Many passages in Joshua and Judges imply that the Israelites did not fight a united offensive, and only took power over the land in slow increments over time. For example, Joshua 13:1 states: “[V]ery much of the land still remains to be taken possession of.”

Judges 1 (vv. 21, 27–36) lists multiple Canaanite city-states in the heartland of the tribal regions still standing in the Judges period (see also Josh. 17:16; Judg. 1:27).

We see from this example that sometimes multiple traditions do not present us with one core narrative and historians must discard one of them almost completely.⁵⁶ This is not the case with the United Monarchy account, for which the many contradictory details do little to derail the overall picture. Instead, the larger outlines briefly summarized in this chapter are assumed by all sources.

Given that the accounts all work with the basic United Monarchy storyline, biblical scholars try to explain the discrepancies. The largest question has to do with the difference between the core stories of Saul and David, on one hand, which tell the story of each leader independently, versus the Saul-and-David sagas, on the other hand, both of which tie the two figures together. A careful look at the sagas reveals clear patterns that may be driving the retelling in this integrative direction.

Agenda Item 1: Making Saul a Failed King

Each of the doubled narratives explains why Saul and his dynasty lost legitimacy in God’s eyes. Whether it is because Saul didn’t wait for Samuel before offering the sacrifice or because he failed to follow God’s word to the letter in his conquest of the Amalekite city, Saul’s failure opens the way for God to choose another person to establish a new

⁵⁶ In this case, biblical historians generally discount the unified conquest account (see summaries in Finkelstein 1988; Faust 2006a).

dynasty. Thus, these stories about Saul's failure function as a defense of the Davidic monarchy.

Significantly, these "failures" are amazing cases of negative spin. The first takes place in the middle of Saul's *successful* campaign against the Philistines, turning that which made his reputation into that which lost him his throne. The Amalekite case is just as egregious. Fighting Amalekites was apparently perceived as an important marker for early Israelite leaders, at least by biblical scribes. Joshua fights Amalekites (Exod. 17:8–16) and both Exodus and Deuteronomy declare them to be Israel's eternal enemy. David annihilates an Amalekite raiding party and kills the Amalekite man who claims to have finished off King Saul. Saul too fights Amalekites (1 Sam. 14:48) but, according to 1 Samuel 15, he does much more than Joshua or David, since he destroys the main Amalekite city and wipes out everyone in it. And yet this very story declares Saul a failure because he didn't execute the king immediately and allowed his troops to take some booty. These examples of extreme spin show that the authors needed to work hard to recast positive memories of Saul into something negative by finding aspects of the success that were "really" failures since they flouted a command of God's.

Agenda Item 2: Adding David to Saul's Story (in Situations Unfavorable to Saul)

The various accounts of Saul's paranoia include episodes of out-of-control violence. Saul is presented as having slaughtered in a murderous rampage the innocent Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:2) and the loyal priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:12–19). He threatens his own men out of a paranoid belief that they are conspiring against him (1 Sam. 22:6–8) and even turns against his own son Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:33).

All these stories point to Saul's lack of fitness as king. Notably, David appears in many of these rage stories as the main object of Saul's fury, whom he not only tries to kill with a spear, but later chases him around the Shephelah and the wilderness of Judah. The text underscores that the fault lies with Saul and not David, and even Saul's children Jonathan and Michal know this. Again, we are seeing an attempt to paint Saul as the bad guy and as having mistreated David.

At the same time, these stories, found in both sets of doublets, *connect* David to Saul. David is Saul's court musician, his arms bearer, his top

warrior, his son's closest friend, and even his son-in-law. David is entirely loyal to Saul, only he is too talented and too successful for Saul to handle. The song of the women that sets Saul off says it all: "Saul with his thousands and David with his tens of thousands."

This second goal complements the first: The Saul–David sagas paint Saul in as bad a light as possible, especially in comparison with the innocent, good, and heroic David, while at the same time showing that David was intimately connected to Saul in every legitimate way imaginable short of blood ties.

David never breaks faith. Saul may have tried to kill his loyal servant, top warrior, and son-in-law David, but David never took advantage of Saul when he had the chance. He even kept faith with Saul's son Jonathan long after Jonathan's death, when he decides to support his old friend's poor crippled son Mephiboshet/Mephibaal as a guest at his table (2 Sam. 9).

Agenda Item 3: Defense of David

In addition to the hatchet job against Saul and the positive portrayal of David, these sources present a consistent defense of David against the suspicious circumstances surrounding many opportune deaths among David's opponents. As Baruch Halpern notes, all who pose a problem for David die, though in each case, the narrative claims that it wasn't David's fault:

- Nabal the Carmelite defies David and soon after dies, but of a heart attack.
- Saul and his sons are killed on Mount Gilboa, but David wasn't there. Despite David's being a client of Gath, King Achish told him not to come. The fact that David ended up with Saul's crown was a coincidence. He even killed the man who brought it to him.
- Ishboshet/Ishbaal, Saul's son and successor and David's rival, is assassinated in his house, but David had nothing to do with it. The fact that David ended up with Ishbaal's head delivered to him was just a coincidence. Again, he even killed the men who brought it to him.
- Saul's other descendants are all killed as well, but God forced David to execute them to avenge the death of the Gibeonites at Saul's hand. David had no choice but to comply in order to end the famine.

- Abner, who served as general for Saul and then Ishbaal, is stabbed to death by David's general Joab, but David didn't want him to do that.
- Absalom's general Amasa is also stabbed to death by Joab, but David didn't want him to do that either.
- David's son Amnon, who raped Tamar – David's daughter and Amnon's own half sister – is killed by Absalom (Tamar's full brother), but this was entirely Absalom's doing; David had no hand in it.
- Absalom, who rebelled against David, is killed by Joab, but David specifically told Joab not to kill him.

The bottom line: These people hurt David or were in his way, and they all died or were killed in suspicious circumstances. It is not unusual for leaders to take out their enemies; Sheba ben Bichri, for example, who rebels against David, is killed by Joab on David's order. Moreover, this clearing out of enemies fits with the picture we see of David in the opening of Kings, in which he tells Solomon to take care of Joab (for killing Abner and Amasa) and Saul's cousin Shimei (for cursing David), to make sure all loose ends are tied up.

For sundry reasons, the text seems uncomfortable with the idea that David was involved in the deaths of these people, and it engages in propagandistic defenses of David against what may have been the prevailing wisdom. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "Methinks the scribe doth protest too much."

The only case in which the biblical authors are open about David disposing of an "opponent," even though they are uncomfortable with this act, is the incident with Uriah the Hittite, whom David sends to his death to cover up his affair with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, whom David subsequently marries (2 Sam. 11). This shows that the scribes were open to at least some criticism of David, but even in this story, David, unlike Saul, immediately confesses, "I have sinned unto YHWH" (2 Sam. 12:13) and therefore his throne and dynastic claim are not taken from him.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Some scholars see this story as a late addition to the David saga, as propaganda against Solomon. Others are sure that the story must have a basis in fact if the authors would have the moxie to tell it.

When and Why Were These Accounts Composed? The Old Consensus

What does this rhetorical analysis tell us about the agenda of the authors of the Saul-and-David sagas? Their point is to connect David to Saul as a legitimate successor while at the same time painting Saul as unstable and unfair, in contrast to David, who is loyal, just, and innocent of all accusations against him.

During what period would scribes have had such an agenda? This, we note, is not a “scientific” question that can be answered with any certainty; authors can have all sorts of motivations. Nevertheless, until recently, most scholars agreed that the most *reasonable* time for such polemics to be written would have been during the reigns of David and Solomon, or very shortly thereafter.⁵⁸ It is during this early period, before the Davidic dynasty is firmly established, that David and his family would be most vulnerable to claims that the Saulides were the legitimate kings and the Davidides pretenders to the throne.

In other words, the scribes who wrote the two Saul-and-David sagas built upon the earlier core accounts of the two figures and wrote a set of stories to connect them while lambasting the former. From a purely rhetorical-analysis perspective, the otherwise incoherent one-two punch of “David is Saul’s legitimate successor and assisted in his heroic exploits” and “Saul was a failure and madman who deserved to lose his dynasty” – the two core elements of both Saul-and-David sagas – makes most sense if composed in the period in which Saul was remembered as the heroic and righteous founder of Israel and vanquisher of Philistines.⁵⁹

All of this led to a virtual consensus among bible scholars and historians of the biblical period in previous generations that Saul, David,

⁵⁸ For example, McCarter 1980a, 1980b.

⁵⁹ See discussion in Brettler 1995: 91–111 (and the notes in 197–207), where he argues that since we know of Saul-and-David polemics that extend into the Second Temple period (such as in the book of Esther), we cannot simply declare that the period of David and Solomon or shortly thereafter is the *only* time such a polemic would have been written (see esp. pp. 109–111). That is true, of course. Nevertheless, we argue that it is an extremely good time for such a polemic to be written. Moreover, it is likely that early written polemics feed into the later ones. Certainly, the polemics in Esther are literarily dependent on 1 Samuel 15–16, meaning that the Samuel text must have been written already and have had an authoritative status such that the allusions in Esther and their meaning would be clear to readers.

Solomon, and Rehoboam were historical figures. It was during this period, they believed, that the bulk of Samuel was written. This is supported by the linguistic analysis (see box “Biblical Hebrew as a Dating Tool”).

Thus most histories of tenth-century Israel reconstructed something along these lines: Saul begins Israel’s concerted response to the Philistine military threat and forms the first nascent Israelite kingdom. He dies and, somehow or other, David, a southern brigand chief who may or may not have had some sort of connection – positive, negative, or both – with Saul, succeeds in taking the throne. He is much more successful than Saul, greatly expanding the kingdom, and establishes a dynasty. David’s son Solomon consolidates this expanded kingdom and uses the tax money to build up his capital in Jerusalem and several other cities. Solomon’s son Rehoboam, however, is unable to hold on to the kingdom, and is left only with the south.

Deconstructing the United Monarchy?

This was the commonly held view of mainstream scholarship until about thirty years ago, but this consensus has all but evaporated. The rejection of the United Monarchy’s historicity has become so entrenched that even considering the United Monarchy as a historical *possibility* has come to be seen as naive.

This sharp rise in skepticism did not result from the internal logic of the texts, nor from a new methodology of studying them. How and why this sea change took place is the subject of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Deconstructing (and Reconstructing) the United Monarchy as Historical

Passing the Baton to Archaeology

AS REVEALED IN Chapter 2's conclusion, the consensus around the historicity of the United Monarchy is long gone. In the following, we will expand a bit on this old consensus and describe its decline and even "death" as it unfolded in the 1990s.

We will also look at the concomitant rise and development of the minimalist school, which, while failing to make many converts, had a major impact on scholarship. Also, we will examine shifts in how the archaeology of the period was perceived and how this worked in tandem with the minimalist approach to further change the consensus. The total effect of this development has been that most scholars today are very cautious to even speak about a large Israelite polity in the tenth century, and the word "empire" has all but disappeared from the discourse.

In the final part of the chapter, however, we will look at how the different approaches have stood – or not stood – the test of time, and how the discoveries made over the past twenty years or so challenge this new skepticism and instead reinforce a more sophisticated version of the older views.

THE (OLD) CONSENSUS

As discussed in Chapter 2, the critical study of the biblical text calls many of the elements of the United Monarchy account into question. This is especially true when dealing with the accession stories of Saul and David, both of which come in multiple versions and seem aimed at placing the "hero" in a positive light. We are also left uncertain as to the relationship

between David and Saul, and the nature of the challenge posed to David by alternative short-lived rivals to the throne such as Ishbaal/Ish-Boshet, Absalom, and Sheba ben Bichri. Finally, as the David stories likely exaggerate his successes and the Solomon stories his wealth and influence, even before the sea change in the 1990s, scholarship tended to take both descriptions with more than a grain of salt. Nevertheless, until recently, scholarship did consider the larger picture presented by this narrative complex to be historical.

It is worth outlining again in broad strokes what this consensus position was: In response to Philistine dominance and invasions, at some point in the late eleventh/early tenth century, a centralized Israelite polity began to emerge. Its first iteration, under the Benjaminite Saul, had some success battling the Philistines but ended in defeat. After a brief succession battle, David, a new king from the south, took the throne, ruling over Saul's kingdom and more.

David picked up where Saul left off but was more successful. He subdued the Philistines and seized Jerusalem, then continued in a war of conquest taking control of the territory of the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Damascus, and defeating other Aramean states. Even though the description of David's army making it all the way to the Euphrates is likely an exaggeration, David's kingdom was the dominant power in the region.

David's son Solomon eventually inherited this kingdom. Solomon, who was not a conqueror but a builder, reorganized the tribal confederation into a centralized government, dividing it into tax-friendly regions to ensure the collection of the maximum in *corvée* labor. With this wealth, Solomon constructed a temple and a palace in his capital city of Jerusalem, making use of Phoenician-style architecture and cedarwood. He also built major cities around the country, such as Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer.

Solomon was a successful king making alliances with powerful neighbors including the Egyptian pharaoh, but it came at a price. When his son Rehoboam took over the throne, the northern tribes rebelled and formed an independent polity. At the same time, Pharaoh Shoshenq I (the biblical Shishak), perhaps sensing weakness in the once-strong polity, led a campaign into the Levant, making it effectively impossible for Rehoboam to use his standing army to win back the north.

When the dust cleared, the Davidic kingdom ruled only the southern hill country, from the area of Benjamin south. From then on, this kingdom was known as Judah, while the northern polity, which also ruled the Israelite Transjordan and the Galilee, took the name Israel.¹

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUPPORT. In the early period of biblical archaeology, material evidence was primarily used to illustrate historical reconstructions. Various summaries of excavation results would note possible correspondences between the finds and the Bible. In the case of the United Monarchy, the best-known example of this approach may be the so-called Solomonic Gates unearthed in several sites.

Already in the large-scale excavations carried out at Megiddo during the British Mandate period, British army officer and archaeologist P. L. O. Guy (1885–1952) dated many features on the mound to the Solomonic era, including a large and impressive six-chambered gate, which served as its entry point (Figure 2).

Decades later, famous Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin (1917–84) found a similar six-chambered gate in Hazor’s tenth-century stratum. Thinking of 1 Kings 9:15, which states how Solomon built Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer, Yadin hazarded a guess that such a gate would be found at Gezer as well.

Most of the mound of Gezer was excavated in the early twentieth century by Irish archaeologist R. A. S. Macalister (1870–1950), so Yadin reexamined the old excavation report and suggested that the structure Macalister described as a Hasmonean fortress (or a Maccabean castle) was actually one side of a “Solomonic” six-chambered gate. When William Dever – one of the most influential American Levantine archaeologists – excavated the area, Yadin was proven correct.²

The idea of Solomonic Gates became so entrenched that even the great Israeli archaeologist Yohanan Aharoni (1919–76), Yadin’s “rival” – the two hardly ever agreed on anything – proclaimed that “this is one of the rare examples in archaeology where the exact date of a building can be determined even without the discovery of any inscription.”³

¹ The popular histories of Bright, Noth, Miller/Hayes, and Ahlström all take this approach more or less.

² Yadin 1958; Dever 2001: 131–134. ³ Aharoni 1972: 302.



Figure 2 The “Solomonic Gate” in Megiddo. The photo shows the eastern chambers of the gate. At the right bottom part of the figure is a plan of the entire gate, with the “light” triangle showing the approximate viewshed from the observation point (the western half of the gate was removed during the excavations) (photographed by Avraham Faust).

Archaeologists and biblical historians similarly attributed many structures and features to Solomon’s building activities and various destruction layers to David’s conquests, thus supplying a wealth of archaeological support to the historical reconstruction of Israel’s history in the tenth century that was based primarily on the Bible.

QUESTIONING THE CONSENSUS: THE EFFECT OF MINIMALISM

The consensus position that the United Monarchy was historical in its broad outlines came under heavy attack in the early 1990s. The backstory for this attack comes from biblical studies and was spearheaded by a group of scholars collectively known as minimalists. Although these scholars are not a “school” in the technical sense of the term, their work fed off each other’s and their views had much in common.

No one study can be characterized as having launched the minimalist approach. The first important book with something like a minimalist bent was *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, published in 1988 by Italian Bible scholar Giovanni Garbini. The movement gained real steam when British Bible scholar Philip Davies published his *In Search of Ancient Israel* in 1992, in which he argued that we really know little, if anything, about the histories of Israel and Judah before the Persian period.

This same year, Thomas Thompson published his tome, *The Early History of Israelite People*, and followed it up in 1999 with *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*. In the latter work especially, Thompson argues, like Davies, that virtually nothing about the Iron Age in the Bible has any basis in fact. All of it, he claims, derives from scribes in the Persian period or afterward, based on only the smallest nuggets of history, a few names of kings, cities, enemies, and so forth.

Niels Peter Lemche, in his 1998 *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, took a similar approach. Finally, Keith Whitelam explicitly brought up the political angle in his 1996 *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*, which argued that by propping up the mythical history of Israel, scholars do a disservice to Palestinian history and are complicit in the squelching of Palestinians' rights.

These publications,⁴ most of which appeared in the 1990s, had very limited success in winning over adherents to their historical reconstructions. Nevertheless, they had a profound, aggregate effect on the scholarly discourse.

EARLY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR MINIMALISM? The minimalists were all biblical scholars and theologians, but their way was paved by one study that relied mostly on archaeology; indeed, given the growing importance of archaeology in reconstructing biblical history, this work may be seen as an important step in enabling the minimalist approach to develop.

In 1991, when the minimalist position regarding the United Monarchy was just beginning to coalesce, David Jamieson-Drake published his Duke

⁴ Garbini 1988; Davies 1992; Thompson 1992, 1999; Whitelam 1996; Lemche 1998b.

University dissertation (1988) as a book titled *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-archaeological Approach*.⁵

The title of Jamieson-Drake's book is somewhat misleading. While his interest was indeed in scribes and schools, he cast a wide net in order to extrapolate about them. Positing a direct correlation between wealth, social complexity, political structure, and the possibility of maintaining scribes and schools, Jamieson-Drake collected data from excavations and surveys about various types of finds, like luxury items and public works, in order to identify levels of social complexity. He plotted the evidence chronologically and regionally, and this enabled him to see sociopolitical development over time and variation between polities.

Since evidence for real wealth, large-scale trade, and sophisticated material culture doesn't appear before the eighth century BCE, Jamieson-Drake argued for the impossibility of a large kingdom ruling from Jerusalem in the tenth century BCE. Judah was simply not developed enough to maintain scribal education and sophisticated administration at this time.

Jamieson-Drake's attempt to come at the question from a fresh angle, using quantitative analysis and sociological markers, was both refreshing and commendable. Nevertheless, in practice, his work was quite problematic. For one thing, he used outdated information such as misdating of the Lachish III, and subsequently misdated many sites. For another thing, he didn't always divide geographical boundaries correctly and ended up with incoherent regional delineation, like including Ashdod in his Judah data.

But these were the smaller problems. More serious were his methodological errors, which suggest that even if he had the data right, the conclusions would still be false. We will refer to three examples:

1. Nowhere did Jamieson-Drake demonstrate a direct connection between social complexity and wealth on one hand and scribal activity on the other, nor did he show what level of wealth is needed to sustain schools. While this is a major issue, we prefer to focus on two other methodological problems with his work.

⁵ Jamieson-Drake 1991.

2. Jamieson-Drake quantified the finds from all sources in the same manner, mixing finds from excavations and finds from surveys. But excavated sites will obviously have far more finds than surveys since they have been dug. Any comparison, therefore, would by definition be extensively skewed (on a scale of thousands of percents).

3. Jamieson-Drake groups the finds by centuries, comparing the tenth, ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries, counting the evidence accumulated for each century. But our data on the different centuries comes from different sources and varies greatly as a result of formation processes. The strata from the eighth and seventh centuries came to an end in massive destruction caused by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian armies, respectively, and the finds were therefore unearthed within sealed destruction layers. Hardly any destructions, however, were inflicted on Judahite cities of the tenth and ninth centuries.

Destruction layers conceal vast amounts of archaeological finds, whereas phases that were neither destroyed nor abandoned produce mostly tiny pottery sherds, gathered from within the floors. Jamieson-Drake compared the quantities of finds found in destruction layers with those found in other types of archaeological accumulations, and in doing so overlooked basic archaeological methods.⁶ Flawed comparisons such as these skew the data set to such an extent as to make all conclusions erroneous.

To exemplify the extent of the problem, let us use the list of complete cooking pots compiled by Michal Elkaslasy as a sort of a control group.⁷ Since it is certain that people cooked throughout the Iron Age, if preservation was the same in all phases of this period, we should have found comparable numbers of such vessels in all of them.⁸

While 137 complete cooking pots were collected from late eighth-century destruction layers in Judah, not a single such complete vessel was published for the tenth–ninth-century BCE (Iron Age IIA) occupations in

⁶ See also Faust and Sapir 2018, 2021, with additional references, and an introduction to the concept of the “old house effect.”

⁷ Elkaslasy collected all complete cooking pots (dated from the Middle Bronze Age to the Persian period) that were published at the time in order to study change in their volume over time and space.

⁸ Some variation is, of course, possible based on demographic changes in the excavated sites.

the same region. Naturally, nobody would suggest that people didn't cook in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE. Instead, the lack of cooking pots is simply a result of the nature of site formation processes – that is, whether the site was destroyed in that period. As there was little destruction in the Iron IIA in Judah, we don't have pots buried in rubble from that period.

The evidence from complete cooking pots supplies objective information regarding the scale of finds from the different Iron Age subphases. It shows just how much we need to adjust our expectations about the quantity of finds in different periods – in this case, the eighth century versus the ninth and tenth centuries – discrediting Jamieson-Drake's calculations.

Despite its problems, some of which other scholars identified immediately,⁹ this seemingly detailed and quantitative work made an impact on biblical scholars, most of whom could not evaluate it. More importantly, perhaps, the book's findings seemed to supply archaeological evidence for what scholars of the minimalist school wanted to hear. Hence the book had a fast and profound effect on the discipline and Jamieson-Drake won over a number of vocal scholars to the idea of a history of Israel without a United Monarchy, with Judah beginning in earnest only in the eighth century.

Box: David Jamieson-Drake and Biblical Minimalism

While Jamieson-Drake's work cannot be credited with creating minimalism, many minimalist scholars took his work as significant support when the school was just founded. For instance, Philip Davies, in his *In Search of Ancient Israel*, published only one year after Jamieson-Drake's book, writes (*italics in the original*):

⁹ See even Lemche 1998b: 79–83, although this did not stop him from referencing this study as “important,” implying it is perhaps even authoritative (e.g., Lemche 1998a: 221n7).

Box: (cont.)

The evidence accumulated by Jamieson-Drake at least shows the impossibility of a Davidic empire administered from Jerusalem, and suggests that Judah became a state, and Jerusalem a major administrative centre, only in the 8th century BCE *at the earliest* ... The range of indices considered by him prompts us to exclude the Davidic and Solomonic monarchies (and their “empire”) from the history of Palestine.¹⁰

Writing that same year, Thomas Thompson states:

The dissertation of E. Jamieson-Drake clearly outlines the archaeological conditions for positing an urban elite in Jerusalem no earlier than the late 8th century ... He also clearly shows that it is first from this period that we can expect not only the formation of a state bureaucracy but also the formation of schools and the support of literacy that were a necessary prerequisite for the creation of state archives and intellectually oriented literary traditions.¹¹

Similarly, in 1996, Keith Whitelam writes that the work of Jamieson-Drake: “[H]elps to expose the mirage of the Davidic-Solomonic ‘empire.’ ... [H]is investigation of the archaeological remains of the period has demonstrated quite forcibly that there was very little evidence of even basic state structures in the tenth or ninth centuries.”¹² Thus, given the growing importance of archaeology in reconstructing biblical history (more later in this chapter), the book was at least a major boost to the minimalist school, if not an enabler.

THE IMPACT OF MINIMALISM. As noted, the minimalist approach per se never gained much support in mainstream scholarship. The idea that all of Israelite and Judahite history was invented in the Persian period based on the smallest of historical scraps contradicts too many facts in archaeology, including written references to events recorded in the Bible or to Israel and Judah in Egyptian, Moabite, Aramean, Assyrian,

¹⁰ Davies 1992: 66. ¹¹ Thompson 1992: 333n73. ¹² Whitelam 1996: 165.

and Babylonian sources.¹³ Moreover, it is in serious tension with the findings of biblical criticism, which, based on both literary and philological concerns, shows how the Bible developed in layers through stages, and was not written all at once in any period, Persian or otherwise.

And yet the minimalist camp did have one very significant effect on the field: Whereas many scholars up to that point had taken an “innocent until proven guilty” (or “accurate until proven false”) approach to the historicity of biblical texts – at least from the beginning of the monarchy onward – this was flipped on its head with the new standard being “guilty until proven innocent.”

This greatly strengthened the hand of a few more moderate scholars such as Egyptologist Donald Redford, who had begun to argue for a cautious skepticism about historical claims in the Bible, especially those that predate the ninth century, where we have much less information from Israel’s neighbors.¹⁴ That cautious skepticism had its greatest effect in the discussion of Israel’s United Monarchy.

THE “COLLAPSE” OF THE UNITED MONARCHY

By the 1990s, most biblical scholars had come to understand the patriarchal period as a mythic construct.¹⁵ The exodus story was similarly called into question, since, whether a small group of Israelites did or did not leave Egypt, once the miracles and massive numbers of people were removed from the story as mythic elaborations, what was left can hardly be equated with the exodus story as we have it.¹⁶

The idea of a unified conquest of all of Canaan fared even worse than the exodus among biblical historians, who tended to see the real history of the Israelite settlement as various tribal groups trickling into the

¹³ Shortly after the emergence of this school in the early 1990s, the Tel Dan inscription was discovered, dating to the ninth century and referencing a king from the house of David. Since at least some of the minimalists denied that there was even such a figure, their position became untenable. Some of them came up with strange excuses and accusations (see, e.g., Davies 1994; Lemche and Thompson 1994), which only further marginalized them.

¹⁴ Redford 1992. ¹⁵ Following Thompson 1974 and Van Seters 1975.

¹⁶ See, recently, the volume edited by Thomas Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William Propp (2015).

Cisjordanian highlands, an area largely devoid of dense Canaanite settlement, and establishing villages there.¹⁷ These villagers slowly built up their strength and started encroaching on the Canaanite cities and villages here and there, conquering some and assimilating others, but not settling in the densely settled Canaanite valleys.

While the biblical picture of the patriarchal, exodus, and conquest periods was deemed ahistorical by most scholars, the opposite was the case for the divided kingdoms from around the ninth century on. Here, the biblical picture writ large was considered more or less reliable. The northern king Omri, who built the city of Samaria and whose son Ahab is famous from the Elijah stories, is mentioned by name in the Mesha Stele, a ninth-century Moabite inscription describing how Mesha reconquered part of the Transjordan from Omri's son. This inscription apparently also contains a reference to the king of the house of David.¹⁸

Another inscribed stela from the ninth century, the Tel Dan inscription, describes a battle between the king of Aram (probably Hazael) and the kings of Israel and Judah. Shortly after that, Israel is mentioned in two separate documents from King Shalmenesar III of Assyria, and after a hiatus of about a century, Israel and Judah are mentioned frequently in Assyrian inscriptions (mainly from the latter part of the eighth century). A century later, after Israel's destruction, a few Babylonian documents mention Judah and some of its kings, though not always by name. Thus, beginning with the ninth century, most scholars have little doubt that the broad contours of Israel and Judah's history as outlined in the Bible are accurate.¹⁹

With the conquest period relegated to myth and the description of the divided kingdoms accepted as overall historical, the burning question became the period of the United Monarchy itself. Was there ever a united Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon? These kings are never mentioned in outside sources. Maybe, some argued, the United Monarchy is a myth. Perhaps Judah and Israel were separate kingdoms from their inception but, after the destruction of the north, southern scribes allowed their

¹⁷ Following Alt 1925, and see summaries in Finkelstein 1988; Faust 2006a.

¹⁸ For example, Lemaire 1994. For a recent attempt to offer an alternative, see Finkelstein, Naaman, and Römer 2019; for a rebuttal, see Langlois 2019.

¹⁹ Again, the minimalists are an exception, but biblical scholarship never followed them on this point.

imaginations or ideologies to run wild and envisioned a past in which Jerusalem once ruled the whole area.²⁰ This latter possibility began to make inroads into mainstream scholarship in the 1990s. At this stage, following the erosion of the historical reliability of the biblical texts, more and more focus was given to archaeology.

DISMANTLING THE PROOFS OF SOLOMON'S KINGDOM: ARCHAEOLOGY TAKES THE DRIVER'S SEAT. In the past, when the United Monarchy was viewed as historical, archaeological finds were often used to illustrate it with destruction layers attributed to David's conquests and large buildings to Solomon's construction activities. With the sea change in the 1990s, biblical scholars began to scrutinize the finds with a much more critical eye. Having reviewed the evidence, they exposed what they interpreted as gaps between the archaeological record and the biblical descriptions, and argued that the archaeologically based assumptions used until then to illustrate the United Monarchy seemed more chimerical than real.²¹

They even questioned the Solomonic Gates, regarded for some thirty years as the most persuasive and successful example of a biblical verse guiding archaeological work. Most instrumental in challenging the association between the gates and Solomon was probably Professor David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University.²² His challenges – and those made subsequently by others – were archaeological in nature (not textual). Among other things, Ussishkin challenged Yadin's attempt to reconstruct a casemate wall in Megiddo, to which the six-chambered gate was connected. Other issues concerned the construction technology, whether the gate had built foundations, and even the situation in other sites, where such gates were built long after the time of Solomon (e.g., at Tel 'Ira in the Beersheba Valley), or outside Israel's borders altogether (e.g., at Ashdod) and thus not by Solomon.

Although most scholars did not accept Ussishkin's critique at the time, others soon joined him. For example, Gregory Wightman's 1990

²⁰ For example, Finkelstein and Silberman 2001.

²¹ We will elaborate on some of these gaps later in this chapter.

²² For example, Ussishkin 1980.

article on “The Myth of Solomon” elaborates on the point that similar gates are found in other cities, periods, and regions (Lachish, Tel ‘Ira, Ashdod), arguing that the association between Solomon and the gates is untenable.²³

Moreover, argued Wightman, a comparison of the pottery in the tenth-century layers in these cities with that of Samaria flips the Solomonic paradigm on its head. According to the Bible, the city of Samaria was built by King Omri, and, therefore, when Kathleen Kenyon published the pottery from its earliest layer, she dated this pottery to the ninth century, when that king ruled. This was controversial because the same style of pottery was found in Hazor and Megiddo, in what most archaeologists (including Kenyon) assumed was the tenth century. But once we realize, argued Wightman, that the Solomonic dating was circular, we can simply date all of the sites with these gates and this pottery to the ninth century and the time of Omri and Ahab.²⁴

These challenges to the identification of the six-chambered gates of Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer as Solomonic were by no means conclusive, as we will discuss shortly. In fact, most scholars continued to accept the association between the gates in these cities with Solomon despite the existence of other, similar gates that are clearly not Solomon’s. Other archaeological challenges, however, were more devastating to the paradigm.

For example, another find of P. L. O. Guy’s in Megiddo was the remains of ancient stables, which he dated to the tenth century and which was immediately hailed as a support for the biblical picture of Solomon’s many horses (1 Kgs. 10:29–29). Yet only a few decades afterward, archaeologists began questioning whether these were in fact stables. Moreover, Yigael Yadin, himself a conservative scholar, noted that Guy had the dating wrong, so that even if these were stables, they would not have been Solomon’s but those of a later monarch.

²³ Whiteman 1990.

²⁴ Most scholars today accept that the assemblages of the tenth and ninth centuries are very similar and are defined (together) as Iron IIA; see Excursus 3.1.

Another example is from Tell Kheleifeh on the Red Sea, excavated by American rabbi and archaeologist Nelson Glueck (1900–71). Glueck believed that the site had a thriving tenth-century layer and identified it as Etzion-geber, thus confirming the Bible's description of this as a port city in the time of Solomon (1 Kgs. 9:26). But many scholars now question the identification of the site. More importantly, it seems unlikely that it was even inhabited in the tenth century.

Glueck also discovered the remains of copper mining and smelting operations at Khirbet en-Nahas (KEN) in the Transjordan and at Timna in the Negev, both of which he dated to the tenth century on the basis of sherds picked up on the surface. Thus he referred to these areas as King Solomon's Mines. This suggestion was widely accepted and served to exemplify the magnitude and wealth of Solomon's empire.

Nevertheless, in the 1960s and 1970s, Beno Rothenberg carried out systematic excavations at Timna and argued that copper mining was carried out by the Egyptian empire toward the end of the Late Bronze Age, long *before* the time of Solomon. On account of Rothenberg's "debunking," Timna became a prime example of the notorious methods of biblical archaeology. In fact, when in 1987, the distinguished journal *Expedition* published a special issue on "Archaeological Facts and Fantasies," along with articles dealing with the lost city of Atlantis, curses of the pharaohs, and Erich Van Daniken's theory of extraterrestrial building projects, was an article devoted to "Solomon, the Copper King: A Twentieth Century Myth."²⁵

Until the 1990s, these examples were viewed as just a few isolated errors without fundamentally changing the way people thought about the United Monarchy. But following the changes in the scholarly discourse in the 1990s, some scholars began to suggest that these errors were emblematic of how scholars were naively taking the Bible's description of this era at face value.

These scholars argued that we should stop looking for evidence of empire such as large gates, massive stables, copper mines, and ports. Instead, they suggested, David and Solomon were probably just local chiefs who ruled over a small territory in Judah near Jerusalem.

²⁵ Muhly 1987.

Among archaeologists, the most vocal and influential scholar defending this approach is Israel Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University. Finkelstein reevaluated the dating of Iron Age sites, downdating many of the strata in what is known as the Low Chronology. We will discuss this reevaluation in Excursus 3.1, but the key point is that the Low Chronology redates many strata traditionally attributed to the tenth century as having been built in the ninth century. If so, these sites cannot be associated with David and Solomon, but rather with later kings, probably Omri or Ahab. During the tenth century, goes the argument, the material culture was a continuation of that of the Iron I, and there were no monumental finds in the relevant sites.

Although this alternative dating has not been adopted by most archaeologists, over the past two decades, the new system has become increasingly popular among a segment of biblical scholars and is the dominant view of the Tel Aviv school of archaeology, a leading institution in the field.

In short, the paradigm shift toward extreme skepticism in biblical studies had a profound effect on biblical archaeology, which began to call into question many of the so-called correspondences between tenth century material culture and the biblical narrative about the United Monarchy. This in turn fed back into biblical scholarship, leading to a reevaluation of an era that had hitherto been a point of consensus.

A LESS EXTENSIVE SOLOMON?

The year 1997 was an especially rough one for King Solomon. First, University of Notre Dame biblical historian Gary Knoppers (1956–2018) published a broad overview article titled “The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel.”²⁶ Knoppers notes the same debate we have described between maximalists and what he calls nihilists, and notes that more and more scholars are falling into a middle camp that does not doubt the existence of David and Solomon *per se* but denies the possibility of a Davidic or Solomonic “empire.”

²⁶ Knoppers 1997.

He illustrates this change with two quotes from mainstream Italian Bible scholar J. Alberto Soggin (1926–2010), who in 1977, wrote, “The Kingdom of David and Solomon constitutes a datum point from which the investigation of Israel’s history can be safely begun.”²⁷ And yet, in 1993, Soggin wrote, “There are no traces even of the Davidic and Solomonic empire outside the Bible and reasonable doubts as to the reliability of the pertinent sources.”²⁸

Knoppers himself was skeptical of the skeptics and expressed support for some more conservative evaluations of this period, but he was aware that the trend in scholarship was moving the other way. Moreover, even he, who was comfortable saying that David and Solomon were kings of a state and not petty chiefs, was more than a little hesitant to accept the idea that they could have been “emperors” ruling over conquered neighboring territories.

That same year, the question of a United Monarchy was hotly debated in a collection of articles edited by Lowell Handy titled *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*.²⁹ As a starting point, let us take the presentation of historian J. Maxwell Miller of Emory University in the opening article of the collection, titled, “Separating the Solomon of History from the Solomon of Legend.”³⁰

Miller begins by arguing that the attempt to establish the Solomonic empire by correlating the biblical account with material culture suffered from a circularity problem:

What happened, in effect, was that literary critics and archaeologists, beginning with the traditional notion of a Solomonic golden age and reinforced in this thinking by each other’s work, made some very compelling cases (or so it seemed at the time) for dating certain elements in the biblical materials and certain archaeological features to the Solomonic period. These “discoveries” in turn, by seeming to confirm in a general way the prior assumption of a great Solomonic golden age, encouraged less than critical thinking about all other aspects of the biblical presentations of Solomon.³¹

²⁷ Soggin 1977: 332. ²⁸ Soggin 1993: 215*. ²⁹ Handy 1997. ³⁰ Miller 1997.

³¹ Miller 1997: 4.

Miller continues by calling attention to the problematic “proofs” for Solomon’s wealthy kingdom surveyed earlier in this chapter. As a consequence, Miller feels compelled to argue for a “less extensive” or even “nonexistent” United Monarchy in his introductory paper.

In the section titled “The Case for a Solomonic Era of More Modest Proportions,” Miller outlines what he calls “four interrelated but essentially independent” arguments against the historicity of a United Monarchy:³²

- (A) The emergence of such an empire would have been out of keeping with the general circumstances of the times.
- (B) An empire of such magnitude and renown as envisioned in the biblical accounts surely would have left some epigraphic traces, especially in royal inscriptions, but none has been found.
- (C) It is unclear how much we can rely on the biblical accounts of Solomon’s reign, much of which stem from the later Deuteronomist.
- (D) The archaeological evidence seems to argue against the existence of an empire centered in the highlands of Cisjordan during the tenth century BCE.

Since Miller’s article, the idea of a modest Solomonic kingdom inflated by later Judean writers has gained ground. Perhaps the clearest example of the new trend appears in the 2001 bestseller *The Bible Unearthed* by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. It offers an overhaul of Israelite history following Finkelstein’s Low Chronology and argues that Israel and Judah had always been independent of each other. In 2006, they followed up with a book dedicated to the United Monarchy titled *David and Solomon*, where they argue that the historical kings of this name were small-time chieftains ruling over the area that eventually became the kingdom of Judah.

According to Finkelstein and Silberman, the image of David’s power was copied from the eighth-century king Hezekiah, who was indeed a powerful monarch, while the image of Solomon’s wealth was taken from King Manasseh, who ruled for more than fifty years and enjoyed wealth and success as an Assyrian vassal. The idea of David and Solomon ruling over the north as well, they argue, is simply fantasy. The overall argument can be summarized as follows: The biblical stories about the United Monarchy

³² Miller 1997: 13.

imagine a world that did not yet exist; it is a retrojection of eighth- or seventh-century realities into the tenth century, but blown up into fantastic proportions. For example, Finkelstein and Silberman claim that public construction in Judah, expressed in ashlar masonry, among other things, did not appear before the late Iron Age, probably “only in the seventh century BCE.”³³ The works highlighted here are just prominent examples of the scholarly trend in the 1990s and early 2000s to shrink the scope of the Davidic monarchy to the region of Jerusalem, presenting the entity as not so much a kingdom but a chieftaincy.

EXPANDING UPON MILLER’S ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEM. To expand upon Miller’s fourth argument, namely that the archaeological picture is in tension with the biblical picture for this period, let’s look at five specific problems that are often noted:

1. **Epigraphic Evidence.** No reference to Saul, David, or Solomon – or even Israel – exists in outside texts or inscriptions from this period.³⁴ This is the flip side of Miller’s argument B, that no royal inscriptions from any of these kings have been found.
2. **Jerusalem.** Jerusalem is too small in size and too modest in material finds to have served as a capital of an empire.³⁵ Admittedly, the limited remains from this period do not prove a lack of habitation, since as a mountainous site, builders always strived to hit bedrock when laying foundations, thus causing major damage to earlier remains. Even so, had there been a large settlement in the tenth century, thousands of sherds should have been unearthed, yet none were. As David Ussishkin wrote in 1998, when the debate was most heated: “What happened to the pottery vessels? Pottery fragments do not decay, so had there been a rich settlement stratum in Jerusalem in the tenth century we would expect to find many thousands of sherds

³³ Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 159; see also Finkelstein 1999; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 235, 245; later, Finkelstein 2015: 202 opted for a late eighth-century date.

³⁴ See Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 128.

³⁵ For example, Thompson 1992: 409; Steiner 1998: 154; 2001: 53; Ussishkin 1998.

from this period in the layers of earth ... but, as is well-known, nothing has been found.”³⁶

3. **Public Construction.** The Bible emphasizes Solomon’s prowess as a builder, the Herod of the tenth century BCE. As such, we should expect to see evidence of his building all over the country, as we do with Herod. And yet archaeology has uncovered no monumental building from this period. In fact, no such architecture appears anywhere in Judah until the eighth century.³⁷ As for the disputed gates and palaces of Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer, many scholars downdate them and, in any event, they are all in the territories of the northern kingdom and are best explained as products of northern Israelite kings, not of the legendary emperor Solomon.
4. **International Trade.** The Bible presents Solomon as someone involved in international commerce. He uses Phoenician builders and imported cedar (1 Kgs. 7:13); he is visited by the queen of Sheba, who brings camel loads of spices and precious gems (1 Kgs. 10:2); he has a fleet of ships that sail from Etzion-gever to Ophir in Africa to trade for gold (1 Kgs. 9:28); he has exotic commodities such as ivory, peacocks, and apes, shipped to him from Tarshish (1 Kgs. 10:22). Yet this is not the world of the tenth century, which was in a global downturn and lacked the robust international trade known from the Late Bronze Age, and which rises again only in the eighth century.³⁸ And the Sabea (Sheba) connections were nothing but legendary since, as Finkelstein and Silberman noted, “it is clear that the Sabea kingdom began to flourish only from the eighth century BCE onward.”³⁹ The descriptions therefore reflect the world of the late Iron Age.
5. **Edomites.** According to the book of Samuel, David conquers the Edomites. But excavations in Edom show that it coalesced as a polity only at the end of the eighth century.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ussishkin 1998: 58. The translation from the Hebrew is ours.

³⁷ Following Jamieson-Drake. Finkelstein, as we have seen, goes so far as to claim that in Judah, “ashlar masonry and stone capitals appear only in the seventh century BCE” (Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 159, and see earlier in this chapter).

³⁸ See discussion in Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 143.

³⁹ Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 171. ⁴⁰ For example, Na’aman 2002a: 214.

These are just examples, but they show how the archaeological support for the United Monarchy gradually – and eventually almost completely – eroded. When combined with Finkelstein’s alternative chronology, it is no surprise that many historians have put a large question mark on the United Monarchy, if not erasing it altogether.⁴¹ Certainly a growing number of biblical scholars have begun to accept that the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon could not have been written in the tenth/ninth century, since there could not have been a kingdom – and scribes – at the time. The background for most of the details must therefore derive from a reality centuries later.

BIBLICAL SCHOLARS AND ARCHAEOLOGY. The minimalists failed to convince mainstream biblical scholarship that virtually all of the details in the Bible about the Iron Age were Persian or Hellenistic period fancies, and their use of the archaeological data was problematic and put them outside the consensus of most scholars. Even so, their arguments opened the door for the ensuing archaeological skeptical approaches, especially those of Finkelstein and his colleagues, and these did the trick.

Notably, most of the archaeological arguments relied on the idiosyncratic Low Chronology, which was (and is) rejected by most archaeologists. Moreover, Finkelstein himself has since retracted most of his more sensational arguments, and his views are now very close to those of the majority (again, see Excursus 3.1).

Nevertheless, Bible scholars are not archaeologists, and many of them, relying on what they think archaeologists claim about the impossibility of a kingdom in the tenth century, have dismissed the tenth/ninth century as a possible dating for the texts. Thus, already in 1997, Ernst Axel Knauf noted that “In the world of the 10th century as represented in the archaeological record there is not room for a Solomonic empire, not even a state of Judah or Israel.”⁴² And Hermann Michael Niemann wrote, “The main problem lies in the discrepancy between the presentation of Solomon’s glorious rule in the biblical theological report and the very modest archaeological evidence.”⁴³ This understanding became more widespread over

⁴¹ For the Low Chronology, see Excursus 3.1. ⁴² Knauf 1997: 81–82.

⁴³ Niemann 1997: 261.

time. In his review of Baruch Halpern's 2001 book on David, which accepts the historicity of the United Monarchy, noted biblical scholar John Van Seters wrote: "The first issue is whether the archaeological evidence of the Iron Age is such that it can confirm the existence of a United Kingdom of David and Solomon and support the picture of its great extent and prestige."⁴⁴

Van Seters then suggests that Halpern has "his roots in the old biblical archaeology," whereas we are now in the time of newer approaches, for which Van Seters relies on Finkelstein. Here is the important point: Archaeology is the main argument that Van Seters – a biblical scholar – brings to refute Halpern's approach. His dispute with Halpern about his methodology in analyzing biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts is only secondary to the main claim that a historical reconstruction that includes a United Monarchy is simply impossible, archaeologically speaking. Indeed, when a few years later, Van Seters wrote his own version of the David saga, he noted, "we now know with a degree of confidence that the sociohistorical contexts in the Court History of David cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence for the tenth century and must belong to a much later age."⁴⁵

This sea change was recently summarized by Matthieu Richelle – a French epigrapher critical of this development – who argued that the archaeological discoveries function now as a "terminus a quo (ca. 800 BCE) for the dating of written sources or redactions of biblical texts."⁴⁶

Thus, ironically, the Bible does not actually play a major role in the current debate, and archaeology is blamed for the death of the Davidic empire. In other words, mainstream biblical scholarship views the United Monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon as mythic, not on the basis of biblical arguments, but based on what they *think* is the consensus of Iron Age archaeologists.

THE EDIFICE AGAINST UNITED MONARCHY BECOMES A HOUSE OF CARDS

As popular as it has become to relegate the United Monarchy to the world of myth or fiction, some of the arguments are illusory, while others simply

⁴⁴ Van Seters 2002: 609. ⁴⁵ Van Seters 2009: xii. ⁴⁶ Richelle, 2016: 2.

fall apart when taking into account the new archaeological information that has come to light over the past twenty-five years.⁴⁷ To best frame the problem with the skeptical approach, let us return to Miller's four arguments. The first thing to note is that they are not all of a piece. In fact, his first three problems are chimerical:

(A) Not a Time of Empires. His first argument is that the tenth century is a time when the major empires of the region, Egyptian, Hittite, and Assyrian, all but disappeared. It is therefore unlikely that, in Israel of all places, an empire, even a modest one, would take root and expand. Nevertheless, the opposite argument can be made just as, if not more, strongly (as indeed it was in the past).

The Israelites were a small group and could never have grown into a powerful and ascendant kingdom as long as the superpowers of that time were dominating the region. Consequently, the tenth century was an especially opportune period in history for a relatively small Levantine polity to flex its muscles and create a locally powerful kingdom. Certainly, even at its height, it could not have competed with a powerful Egypt or Hatti, but this is the point – it did not have to.

(B) No Inscriptions. The second argument, that epigraphic remains of royal inscriptions from Saul, David, or Solomon should have been found if such a powerful polity had existed, is equally questionable. Miller attempts to reinforce it by comparison to Israel's neighbors, where inscriptions can be found, written, for example, by Pharaoh Shoshenq or Hazael of Aram. This absence of epigraphic evidence for David and Solomon, claims Miller (pp. 14–15), stretches our credulity.⁴⁸

But this is a false comparison. Miller assumes implicitly that Israelite or Judahite kings would act like kings of other polities and commission royal inscriptions. Yet this is not the case. Even when we enter “historical

⁴⁷ Indeed, in contrast to the impression one might get, most archaeologists (and many biblical scholars) never adopted the minimalist approach and maintained (even if disagreeing on many details) that the kingdom of David and Solomon was real and that its archaeological footprints can be found. See, for example, Halpern 2001; Stager 2003; Mazar 2005, 2010; Ben-Tor 2016; Dever 2017; Ortiz 2018; Lemaire 2021; Master 2021; Ortiz and Wolf 2021; see also Frese and Levy 2010; Schniedewind 2010; Holladay and Klassen 2014; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018.

⁴⁸ Miller 1997: 14–15.

time” – that is, the kingdoms of Omri, Jehu, and Jeroboam in the north or Hezekiah and Manasseh in the south – we still do not find *any* Israelite or Judahite royal inscriptions. Nevertheless, no serious historian doubts the mere existence of these kings, which would be impossible, since contemporary Assyrian documents mention them by name.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that, for whatever reason, Israelite and Judahite kings did not produce many royal inscriptions.⁴⁹ If this is correct, then the fact that Saul, David, and Solomon did not either hardly proves there was no polity at this time.

(C) The Biblical Accounts Are Late and Include Exaggerations. The third argument is essentially what we discussed in Chapter 2, and the claim is true as far as it goes. At the same time, as we have seen, the stories contain ancient layers and much of the material is pre-Deuteronomistic. While it is true that the biblical text cannot be taken at face value, the use of such an argument in this context contains a certain amount of misdirection.

Granted, there may be scholars who have argued for the literal truth of such fantastic claims as Solomon writing a thousand parables or having a thousand wives. But even if we were to declare all of these claims to be myths and to go further and say Saul wasn’t mad, David never made it to the Euphrates, and Solomon was nowhere near as wealthy as depicted, this does little to affect the main claim of the biblical text: Saul united much of Israel under his banner, David was a conqueror who dominated many of Israel’s local neighbors, and Solomon was a wealthy builder and successful administrator who ruled all of Israel and was an influential force in the region.

Critical reading of the biblical text does little to contradict this general picture, even if one can debate hundreds of small details about each ruler. What changed, as we have seen, was not the biblical text or its interpretation, but the understanding of the sociopolitical context of the tenth century, and this was based on the archaeological evidence.

D) Archaeological Picture. This leaves us with the most important of the four arguments, namely that the archaeological picture does not jibe with the biblical picture. Here, let us return to the five exemplary points we outlined earlier.

⁴⁹ It is likely that they did produce them on rare occasions, but it appears that they were very rare.

1. Epigraphic Evidence. It is true that we do not have epigraphic evidence for the United Monarchy and its kings from the scribal records of important empires like Assyria or Egypt, but this is because, as already noted, the empires had either collapsed or were in decline in this period. Had these empires left any information on the region in the tenth century with names of other kingdoms or kings, the lack of reference to Israel would have been meaningful, but as no other names are mentioned, the silence says nothing about the United Monarchy, only about the weakness of the traditional empires. Indeed, this weakness is the very circumstance that enabled the Israelites to forge a local kingdom in this period; it lacked serious competitors other than small local polities.

2. Jerusalem. We should begin by noting that the size of the capital does not necessarily indicate much about the territory it ruled. The first capitals of many early empires – including very large ones like the Mongol, Hun, and Zulu empires – were quite small and sometimes constituted no more than temporary camps (see also Chapter 14).

In fact, sometimes the opposite occurs, with capital cities growing larger over time, even when the territory they rule contracts. As University of Michigan anthropology professors Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery noted in reference to the capital city of the ancient Zapotec state in what is now Mexico's Oaxaca: "Ironically, even while the city of Monte Alban was growing to its maximum size, the boundaries of its tribute territory had begun to shrink."⁵⁰

Putting this aside, the claims about Jerusalem's size and the nature of the finds in it are simply mistaken. Even in the 1990s, when these claims were made, the image of Jerusalem as a small village should have been rejected. First, the paucity of remains from the tenth century does not negate the fact that we have large edifices such as the Stepped Stone Structure and the Large Stone Structure, both of which, although built in the Iron I, seem to have remained in use during the tenth century.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For Jerusalem, see Faust 2004 (also Chapter 14); for the latter example, see Marcus and Flannery 1996: 206.

⁵¹ The Large Stone Structure was excavated only later, but the Stepped Stone Structure was known in the 1990s.

Second, the pottery that was supposedly missing was not; it simply hadn't been published at the time of the debate. This is because only preliminary reports had been published from the various large-scale digs carried out in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; preliminary reports publish only highlights, specifically material that the excavators believe will be of major interest to other scholars. As no one until that time was questioning whether Jerusalem had been a large city in the tenth century, this pottery wasn't published. Once the question was raised, the excavators began to present the pottery.

There is now no question that pottery from this period (Iron IIA) was found in practically every excavation area in the City of David, including down the (eastern) slopes toward the Kidron, as well as in the Ophel.⁵² And since the Ophel was not only fortified but probably also had public buildings, the Temple Mount must have been incorporated within the boundaries of the city – otherwise the Ophel would be defenseless. This means that Jerusalem's area was some 16.5 hectares, suggesting that it was very large when compared with other sites in Judah at the time. In fact, it was quite large in comparison to most highland sites in Israel throughout history.⁵³

3. Public Construction. The argument that there was no public construction during this period is also mistaken. The recent excavations at Hazor by Amnon Ben-Tor and Sharon Zukerman corroborated the tenth-century date of the so-called Solomonic Gate and of additional structures (Stratum X). The same is true for Gezer, as the renewed excavations led by Steve Ortiz and Sam Wolff also confirmed the tenth-century date of the Solomonic Gate in this city.⁵⁴

Even at Megiddo, excavated by Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and their colleagues, Finkelstein had to rectify his initial dating, and he now agrees that the last Canaanite city (Stratum VIA) was destroyed in the early tenth century BCE. Although he still tries to push down the date of the first Iron II settlement (Stratum VA), even according to him, Megiddo must have been re-built in the tenth century (see more in Excursus 3.1).⁵⁵

⁵² Also De Groot 2001; E. Mazar 2011; Faust forthcoming a.

⁵³ For a summary, see Faust in press, and Chapter 15.

⁵⁴ See Ben-Tor 2016; Ortiz and Wolf 2021; see also Chapter 15.

⁵⁵ In the past, he tried to downdate the destruction to 920, but even in his Low Chronology, this didn't pan out (e.g., Halpern 2001: 463). See recently Kleiman et al. 2019.

While Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo are well known as the classic examples of Solomonic building, tenth-century public constructions are not limited to these sites.⁵⁶ In fact, they aren't even limited to the north, as often implied.

For example, our recent excavations at Tel 'Eton, in the Judean Shephelah, exposed an impressive residence erected in the first half of the tenth century, according to radiometric dates taken from the floor's makeup. Its construction made use of ashlar stones – something Finkelstein claimed did not happen in Judah until some 250 years later.⁵⁷

The same applies to Beth-Shemesh, which, according to the excavators, was transformed from a village to a central town by the mid tenth century. These layers all have monumental architecture (palaces, administrative buildings, etc.) and show serious investment from a central power.⁵⁸ Finally, excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa reveal an entire fortified town built from scratch during the very beginning of the Iron II.⁵⁹

4. International Trade. The belief that international trade was not a feature of the tenth century, while common in the 1990s and early 2000s, has turned out to be a mistake. Until recently, there was a consensus that the Phoenician westward expansion did not begin before the eighth century BCE. This meant that the biblical account in Kings, according to which Phoenicians were an expansive economic and naval power already in the time of Solomon, had to be ahistorical. The same applied to non-Israelite traditions about the foundation of Phoenician sites in Europe and Africa already in what we call the Iron IIA.

⁵⁶ We note that the existence of additional six-chambered gates, whether other tenth-century gates in Israel, tenth-century gates outside Israel, or later gates, is irrelevant to the question of whether the gates at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo are dated to the tenth century, and whether Solomon was responsible. Others could use the same template at this time or later, and even before, without impacting the question of Solomonic construction at these sites (see more in Chapter 15).

⁵⁷ Faust and Sapir 2018, 2021. The house was built in the longitudinal four-spaces style discussed later in this book.

⁵⁸ Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016. ⁵⁹ Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018.

Recent studies show, however, that Phoenician colonization in the west started much earlier. Already in the tenth century, the Phoenicians reached many of the Mediterranean coasts, if not beyond, and their actual colonization might have started in the tenth century, and certainly by the ninth.⁶⁰ In fact, evidence suggests that already at this time, silver from the west was used in the Levant.⁶¹

Furthermore, a new study of the content of Iron Age pilgrim flasks (using a technique known as residue analysis) shows that already in the eleventh and tenth centuries, some contained cinnamon, a lightweight luxury commodity originating in the Indian Ocean.⁶² This must have arrived in the region as part of the Arabian trade in incense products.

Recent discoveries also clarify that kingdoms flourished in South Arabia – the region of Sheba – long before the eighth and seventh centuries. Peter Stein, for instance, noted that “Radiocarbon dates of wooden manuscripts . . . indicate that writing in South Arabia probably started . . . as early as in the eleventh to tenth centuries BCE.”⁶³ Similarly, A. J. Drewes and his colleagues argued that “perhaps by the end of the tenth century BC at the latest, palm-leaf stalks were being used in Yemen for everyday documents, and that literacy in the South Arabian script was already employed . . . for sophisticated everyday purposes.”⁶⁴

To this, we add the recent work of Daniel Vainstub on a brief text inscribed on a large storage vessel unearthed in the Ophel in Jerusalem, in what appears to be a tenth-century public context. The inscription received many interpretations as various aspects had seemed bewildering, but Vainstub, reinterpreting the find, has shown that these difficulties are solved once we understand that the “inscription was engraved in the Ancient South Arabian script and that its language is Sabaean.” Vainstub adds that the inscription refers to the content of the vessels, which included five ephahs (app. 110–120 liters, which is indeed the

⁶⁰ See, for example, Gonzales de Canales, Serrano, and Llompart 2006; López Castro et al. 2016.

⁶¹ See Thompson and Skaggs 2013; see also Eshel et al. 2019; Wood, Bell, and Montero-Ruiz 2020.

⁶² For example, Gilboa and Namdar 2015. ⁶³ Stein 2020: 338.

⁶⁴ Drewes et al. 2013: 201.

reconstructed volume of the vessel) of incense. He concluded that: “The inscription was engraved before the locally made vessel was fired, leading to the conclusion that a Sabaeen functionary entrusted with aromatic components of incense was active in Jerusalem by the time of King Solomon.”⁶⁵ Given the new information from southern Arabia, such a reconstruction cannot be dismissed as implausible.

Finally, recent studies have shown that the southern Levant was a major source of copper throughout the eastern Mediterranean during this period, which brings us to the next point.

5. Edom. The image of Edom as devoid of settlement prior to the late eighth century BCE also proved completely wrong. Recent excavations have demonstrated that at the time discussed here, the lowlands of Edom were not only settled, but exhibit evidence of social complexity and massive copper production.⁶⁶

Here we return to the so-called cautionary tale of King Solomon’s mines. While Glueck’s writings and interpretations were indeed simplistic, the recent scientific studies of Thomas Levy, Mohammad Najjar, Erez Ben-Yosef, and their colleagues at Faynan and Timna show that Glueck was more accurate than his later critics. The new excavations demonstrate conclusively that most of the mining and smelting is later than the time of the Egyptian empire, and that it developed in the course of the Iron I, reaching a peak precisely in the tenth century BCE.⁶⁷

An additional example is the reference to Toi, the king of Hamath, in 2 Samuel 8, whose existence as a historical person from this period was demonstrated when his name was found in a contemporary neo-Hittite inscription.⁶⁸ (This will be discussed in Chapter 15.) These are but examples of how new data fits with the broad picture painted in the core biblical description.

⁶⁵ See Vainstub 2023. The quotes are taken from the abstract on page 42.

⁶⁶ For example, Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014; Sapir-Hen and Ben-Yosef 2014; Ben-Yosef, Langgut, and Sapir-Hen 2017; Levy, Ben-Yosef, and Najjar 2018.

⁶⁷ The peak continued into the ninth century (with some changes) and then suddenly declined. The issue will be discussed at some length in Chapter 9.

⁶⁸ Steitler 2010; Galil 2014.

SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE SKEPTICISM. It turns out that there is no smoking gun against the United Monarchy. Most of the arguments against it thus far have turned out to be either spurious or based on outdated archaeological paradigms. All of this, however, simply returns us to the status quo ante, namely that nothing in the material remains is inconsistent with the general outlines of the biblical story. Hence, the old consensus, described in the end of Chapter 2, can probably be reinstated, even if modified.

But can we say more than this? Is there anything in the vast archaeological record that is more than just consistent with the biblical story but would push archaeologists based merely on the material evidence to propose the existence of a powerful kingdom in this period? Is there positive evidence of the United Monarchy?

As we will show in Part II (Chapters 4–12), the answer is a resounding yes. Many finds do more than just corroborate the general outlines of the biblical description of the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, but demand that something like this must have existed in the tenth century.

EXCURSUS 3.1 BIBLICAL TIMELINE, PHILISTINES, RADIOCARBON DATING, AND THE UNITED MONARCHY: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LOW CHRONOLOGY

The Bible does not include dates. All we have are regnal years with occasional reference to other events. When the named kings, or the events mentioned with reference to regnal years, can be synchronized with external sources of information – and with events for which we have absolute dates on the basis of these sources – we can attribute absolute dates also to the relevant biblical kings or events. The recurrent connections between Israel and the much better documented Mesopotamia during the eighth–seventh centuries BCE offer many opportunities to synchronize the chronology of ancient Israel with that of Assyria and Babylonia.

This is significant since Mesopotamian scribes would often record astronomical events associated with certain episodes in Mesopotamian history, thereby providing modern historians with absolute dates. And since we have a developed internal chronology of Mesopotamian dynasties and events, these isolated absolute dates help us date other events and monarchs as well.

It is worth stressing at this point that we are not speaking about only a few such synchronizing pegs; we have many such pegs, and together these dates create a large and formidable picture of dynasties and events that is very coherent, with each component supporting the other components. Furthermore, absolute dating is no longer dependent on these alone. Instead, a number of scientific methods of independent and largely “objective” dating have been developed over the years – the best known is radiocarbon (carbon 14) dating, but there are others – and these, by and large, support the large chronological edifice just mentioned.

The ability to synchronize events recorded in the Bible with Mesopotamian regnal years therefore enables us to arrive at absolute dates also for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. After all, kings like Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, as well as Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib of Assyria, are prominent in the biblical narrative and their regnal years are sometimes mentioned in tandem with regnal years of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Since we can calculate the calendar years of these Mesopotamian kings, we also have the absolute dates for the biblical monarchs, at least

for the last 150 years of the monarchic era. And as the Bible provides a consistent internal chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah – the regnal years of monarch of each kingdom are mentioned in comparison to those of the other kingdom – many scholars attempt to create a coherent relative chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah.⁶⁹

When we combine this relative chronology with the absolute dates we have for some of its later segments, we can replace it with an absolute one. This chronology, with its strong internal consistency, together with the occasional synchronization with other events, places the United Monarchy in the tenth century, with Solomon ending his reign at about 930 BCE.

As for how long Saul, David, and Solomon reigned, here the Bible is less helpful. It gives both David and Solomon typological numbers, forty years apiece (2 Sam. 5:4, 1 Kgs. 11:42), which is more of a rhetorical than historical statement about the completeness of their reigns. As for Saul, the verse with his regnal years is clearly corrupt – it says he was one year old when he became king and ruled for two years (1 Sam. 13:1).⁷⁰

If we accept the schematic biblical dating at face value, then Solomon's reign should be dated to about 970–930 BCE, David's to circa 1010–970 BCE, and Saul's to before that – perhaps from about 1030 or 1040 BCE or so. These figures, however, are clearly schematic and unreliable. We do not really know how long each monarch reigned, but we can guess that something like twenty or thirty years apiece makes sense (for various reasons, explored later in the book, we think that an average of twenty-five years makes sense).

In any event, in aggregate, these kings would have ruled mostly in the tenth century – Saul may have begun his rule in the very late eleventh century. This is why the United Monarchy is attributed to the tenth century – so much so, that the entire debate is often dubbed “the tenth-century debate.”

⁶⁹ The classic work on reconstruction of biblical chronology, relying on co-regencies, was done by Thiele (1944, 1951). A slightly adjusted version is Galil (1996). Other attempts include, for example, Hayes and Hooker 1988 and Tetley 2005, but these did not use co-regencies and created many problems that are difficult to accept.

⁷⁰ Ironically, the one king whose regnal years from this period might actually be preserved accurately in the Bible is Ish-boshet, who is said to have been forty years old at his accession and to have ruled for two years (2 Sam. 2:8).

Box: Absolute and Relative Dating

Relative dating refers to the “determination of chronological sequence without recourse to a fixed time scale.” This can be done by arranging artifacts typologically from older to newer or, as is common in the Near East, by the superimposition of the remains in archaeological sites – mainly mounds – one on top of the other.

Absolute dating is the “determination of age with reference to a specific time scale, such as fixed calendrical systems.” This can be achieved by any means that associate the finds with absolute dates – for example, coins, inscriptions, or scientific methods like radiocarbon dating (see more later in this chapter).⁷¹

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CHRONOLOGY OF IRON AGE ISRAEL

When archaeologists began to create a timeline, strata dated to the tenth century were roughly associated with the period of David and Solomon or with their activities. As we note in Chapter 3, these included many destruction layers attributed to David’s conquests, such as that of Megiddo and Yokneam, and later in that century the construction of many settlements, the best-known examples being Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer with their six-chambered gates, which were attributed to Solomon.

But how did these scholars decide to date these strata to David and Solomon? Archaeological dating at this stage was not absolute, but relative. Archaeologists easily identified the destruction layers – often massive – caused by the Assyrian conquests of the late eighth century and the Babylonian ones of the late seventh and early sixth centuries. These strata and the associated material culture were easily dated, sometimes even to specific military campaigns. They therefore provided a clear chronological “anchor” for many sites (Figure 3).

Strata discovered below them were obviously dated to an earlier era, and thus was created a thick and complex system of relative Iron Age dating, each phase with its own material characteristics sometimes

⁷¹ Renfrew and Bahn 2012: 596, 602. See more in Chapter 5.



Figure 3 The destruction layer in one of the rooms of the governor's residence at Tel 'Eton (photographed by Avraham Faust).

referred to as a horizon. It was difficult to attribute dates to the various horizons when all that was known was that they were earlier than the late eighth century – or earlier than the horizon that was earlier than the late eighth century, as we do not know how long each horizon lasted. Here, however, archaeologists were helped by another, earlier “anchor.”

The Philistines are quite prominent in this book and are discussed in many chapters; in a nutshell, they were a foreign group(s) that settled in part of the southern coastal plain of Israel. The main Philistine cities were Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Gath, and Ekron, four of which are known also from archaeological excavations, and the fifth (Gaza) only from the textual sources.⁷² The Philistines brought with them unique material cultural traits that archaeologists can track. Most importantly, they made use of a very distinctive Aegean style of decorated pottery known as Philistine Monochrome (or Mycenaean IIIC:1; see Chapters 4 and 5). Scholars were in agreement that the new settlers used it for a few generations subsequent

⁷² For the Philistines, see, for example, Dothan and Dothan 1992; see also Stager 1995; Yasur-Landau 2010; various papers in Killebrew and Lehmann 2013; Fischer and Bürge 2017.

to their arrival. And since Egyptian sources dated to the early twelfth century described the arrival of the Philistines (see later in this chapter), this pottery was attributed to much of the twelfth century before it disappeared toward the end of the century (Chapter 5).

Between these two dated anchors – that is, Philistine arrival and eighth-/seventh-century destruction of Israel/Judah – archaeologists organized the strata in a neat sequence and synchronized the finds with historical events and figures from these eras. This process resulted in a wide consensus that some strata, with their unique ceramic horizons and architectural elements, should be dated to the tenth century and attributed to the kingdom of David and Solomon. The dating of the aforementioned Solomonic Gates was done following this logic.

QUESTIONING THE TRADITIONAL CHRONOLOGY: WHEN DID THE PHILISTINES ARRIVE?

In the 1990s, Israel Finkelstein challenged the date of the initial phase of Philistine settlement – the chronological anchor for the earlier period – and advocated for an alternative Low Chronology. As noted, the Philistine's arrival is dated by synchronizing the archaeological evidence for the presence of a foreign group – that is, Monochrome pottery – with Egyptian written sources.

In his Medinat Habu inscription, Ramesses III (ca. 1187–1156 BCE) mentions that in his eighth year, he battled the invading Sea Peoples, among whom he lists the Peleset – that is, the Philistines. This led scholars to date the settlement of the Philistines on the Levantine coast to the early part of the twelfth century, around 1180/1175.

Thus, archaeological strata in which excavators found Monochrome pottery – that is, the pottery used by the first Philistine settlers – were therefore dated to around 1180–1130 BCE, after which a new type of Philistine pottery, known as Bichrome pottery, took over.

As Finkelstein correctly observed, the Philistine settlement is the one secure archaeological anchor for the dating of the early Iron I, just as the Assyrian destruction layers serve as the secure anchors for the late eighth

century BCE. Everything between these anchors is dated, as we have seen, on the basis of a relative chronology.⁷³

The dating of the settlement of the Philistines was first called into question by David Ussishkin, based on his findings in Lachish.⁷⁴ The last Canaanite city of Lachish (Level VI), which was still functioning as part of the Egyptian empire during the reign of Ramesses IV, was destroyed between 1150 and 1130 BCE. This absolute dating, based mostly on the finding of two scarabs bearing the name of Ramesses IV (who ruled between 1151 and 1042), is not disputed. According to the traditional model, this would mean that the city functioned contemporaneously with the first few decades of the Philistine city-states.

This, however, poses a problem, since, to quote Ussishkin, “Philistine pottery is altogether missing at Tel Lachish.”⁷⁵ He notes that:

Considering the geographical location of the site,⁷⁶ the absence of this distinctive pottery seems to indicate that it was simply not settled at the time that painted Philistine pottery was being produced. The destruction date of Level VI therefore serves as a clear *terminus post quem*⁷⁷ for dating the appearance of this pottery in the region . . . It is difficult to imagine that these nearby Philistine cities (Gath and Ekron) could have coexisted with Lachish without an appreciable quantity of their typical pottery reaching the latter.

Thus Ussishkin took the radical step of essentially downdating the beginning of the Philistine settlement by fifty years:

“Consequently, we have to conclude that these prosperous Philistine centres could have come into being only after Canaanite Lachish had been utterly destroyed, i.e. probably not before the middle of the 12th century B.C.E.”

Initial reactions to this suggestion were skeptical.⁷⁸ Still, Ussishkin’s ideas found fertile soil in the mid-1990s in the mind of his colleague, Israel Finkelstein.

⁷³ Finkelstein 1995: 213. ⁷⁴ For example, Ussishkin 2014: 194–196.

⁷⁵ Ussishkin 1983: 170.

⁷⁶ In relation, for example, to Ekron, where such pottery is abundant.

⁷⁷ Meaning the earliest possible date (for the appearance of this pottery).

⁷⁸ For example, Stager 1995: 334–335.

THE LOW CHRONOLOGY. Finkelstein first notes that, in addition to the evidence from Lachish, stratum IX of Tel Sera, another site in this region, also has no Monochrome pottery, and we know that it lasted at least until the twenty-second year of the reign of Ramesses III based on an inscription found there. Finkelstein further notes that no Egyptian artifacts can be found in Philistine sites from the Monochrome period, further supporting the idea that the Monochrome phase postdated the era of Egyptian domination.

Finkelstein therefore argued that we must assume that no Philistine settlements appeared in the Levant until after Egyptian hegemony ended, around the time of Ramesses VI, and the arrival of the Philistines as settlers should be dated to 1135 BCE or later. The Monochrome phase, that is, the strata in which Monochrome pottery was found, then lasted for a few generations, “at least until 1100 BCE,” and probably the beginning of the eleventh century.⁷⁹

And if the Monochrome phase and its contemporaneous levels throughout the country should be downdated, this *must* downdate the strata just on top of them – that is, the strata with the Bichrome pottery and the contemporaneous levels elsewhere. If these strata, including the later type of Bichrome, were typically dated to the late twelfth and eleventh centuries, they must now be dated to the eleventh century and the first half of the tenth.⁸⁰ And the same applies to the strata sitting on top of these, which were traditionally dated to the tenth century and attributed to the time of United Monarchy, and which must now be dated to a later period – that is, the late tenth century and mostly to the ninth.⁸¹ Mazar and Finkelstein called it a “snowball effect.”⁸²

Finkelstein therefore redated destruction levels that were traditionally dated to around 1000 BCE and attributed to King David, like the destruction of Megiddo VIA and Qasile X, to the late tenth century, and attributed them to the conquests of Pharaoh Shoshenq (the biblical Shishak; see more later in this chapter), concluding that: “[F]rom the archaeological perspective,

⁷⁹ Finkelstein 1995: 224; 1996c: 180.

⁸⁰ Perhaps even as late as the mid tenth century (Finkelstein 1996c: 182; see also pp. 179, 180).

⁸¹ Finkelstein 1996c: 180, 182. ⁸² Mazar 1997: 159; Finkelstein 1998: 169.

the line between the Iron I and the Iron II, characterized by the appearance of monumental building activity, growing evidence for writing, a shift to mass production of pottery, and a growing wave of settlement in the highlands, should be put in the *early ninth century* rather than c. 1000 BCE.”⁸³ An additional benefit of the Low Chronology, noted Finkelstein, was that it solved a known problem in the archaeology of the south, that of the “missing” ninth century. In many sites – for example, in Tel Mor, Tel Beit Mirsim, Ashdod, and Tel Haror – there are no known remains from this century, and in some other sites, like Tel Halif and Tel Sera, these levels are overly thin. In these and other sites, there are tenth-century remains, and on top of them significant eighth-century levels. Pushing the tenth-century remains to the ninth, he argued, fills this gap.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MEGIDDO, SAMARIA, AND JEZREEL: THE CLINCHER? A clincher for this argument came from a comparison of Megiddo Stratum VA/IVB – usually attributed to Solomon – with that of Samaria.⁸⁴ Megiddo VA/IVB features ashlar construction similar to that of the earliest building in Samaria, including the same style of stonework and even identical mason marks, implying that the same people oversaw their construction.

According to the Bible (1 Kgs. 16:24), Samaria was founded only by the Omride dynasty, and Ussishkin, Finkelstein, and others therefore argued that Megiddo Stratum VA/IVB must also date from this period. This was further supported by the similarity between the pottery assemblage of Megiddo in this phase and that of the Jezreel enclosure, which Jehu destroyed in his coup only a couple of decades after it was built.⁸⁵

THE NEW CHRONOLOGY. The result of these arguments was a complete overhaul of Iron Age chronology, with grim consequences for the United Monarchy. Taking Megiddo as a well-known example, the traditional interpretation held that the last Canaanite city (Stratum VIA) flourished in the

⁸³ Finkelstein 1996c: 185 (our emphasis).

⁸⁴ See Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 280; Ussishkin 2007: 304.

⁸⁵ Finkelstein and Silberman 2001:343; Ussishkin 2007: 304.

eleventh century and was destroyed by King David at around 1000 BCE. This was followed by a short-lived settlement (Stratum VB), on top of which the famous Solomonic city (Stratum VA/IVB) was built.

Finkelstein's alternative chronology would place the Canaanite city of Stratum VIA in the tenth century and attribute its destruction to Shishak (at around 925 BCE). The impressive city of Stratum VA/IVB couldn't therefore have been built by Solomon, but rather by the Omride dynasty.⁸⁶

EARLY RESPONSES TO THE LOW CHRONOLOGY

Given the implications of the Low Chronology for the historicity of the kingdom of David and Solomon, Finkelstein's alternative chronology attracted much attention. Unsurprisingly, the new approach was not accepted unanimously, and a number of scholars quickly pointed out the problems. At the forefront of the detractors was Amihai Mazar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In his first rebuttal, Mazar⁸⁷ offered detailed responses to each of Finkelstein's suggested redatings. For one, the ninth-century gap is not as daunting as Finkelstein claims, since absent a destruction layer, it is not surprising that finds would be very limited. When a site is destroyed, or even abandoned, many remains are left in situ and can be unearthed; otherwise, most of the broken pots get disposed of in dumps outside the settlement and we have no access to them. The buildings will naturally be dated to the time of their destruction, from which many finds will be present. Worse, in other cases, where there is no gap, such as in Hazor, Tel Kinrot, Tel Qeisan, Ashdod, Tel Beersheba, and others, the Low Chronology forces us to squash multiple layers into a very short time frame.

In addition, Finkelstein's arguments are sometimes vague. For example, the similarity of the assemblage of Megiddo Stratum VA/IVB to Jezreel's assemblage is in the eye of the beholder, as there are also many differences. This is true not only of the style of building but also of the mason's marks, which have some overlap but are not

⁸⁶ Finkelstein 1996c: 182–183. ⁸⁷ Mazar 1997.

identical. Moreover, if the marks are Carian writing, as Norma Franklin has argued, then this would easily explain the similarity as being due to the ethnic identity of the foreign masons and not due to the masons being literally the same people.⁸⁸ As for pottery similarities, Mazar stressed that the ceramics used during most of the tenth century continued into the ninth with very few changes.

As for the question of the missing Monochrome pottery, which is the crux of the Low Chronology, Mazar's main argument is that the claim that sites ruled by the Egyptians did not make use of Monochrome pottery (a claim that Finkelstein argued "must be rejected" and that one "cannot accept") is actually quite plausible.

First, Mazar points to a few archaeological examples of such segregation between groups, where members of one group did not use of the pottery of the other and vice versa. For example, in the Early Bronze III, Khirbet Karak ware was used in Beth-Shean, Megiddo, and Yokneam, but just a few kilometers away, in Tel Qashish, not a sherd can be found.⁸⁹ Other scholars soon joined Mazar in pointing out examples of such sharp separations.

One example we shall discuss at length in a later chapter is Philistine Bichrome ware. This pottery was very popular in Philistine dominated sites in the Iron Age I, and was even used, though sparingly, in northern Canaanite sites. Yet in most Israelite sites, not a sherd is to be found. And sometimes it is found in one neighborhood, but is missing from another neighborhood of the same settlement (e.g., at Tel Qasile, and see Chapter 7).

Finkelstein's main response to these arguments was that such cultural segregation – what he teasingly called Mazar's "apartheid theory" – seems difficult to understand and that therefore his historical suggestion of first Egyptians then Philistines was preferable.⁹⁰ He then challenged his opponents to give clear ethnographical examples of such a phenomenon.

⁸⁸ Franklin 2001.

⁸⁹ Mazar's other examples are Middle Bronze Bichrome ware, which is used in Megiddo but absent from Beth-Shean, and the pottery of seventh-century Ekron and Tel Batash, both Philistine sites, which is absent in neighboring Judean sites from that period.

⁹⁰ Finkelstein 1998.

Spurred by this challenge, Shlomo Bunimovitz and one of the authors (AF) supplied several such examples, which also explain the phenomenon.⁹¹ In the present context, we'll make do with one: Ian Hodder – today at Stanford University and at that time a leading Cambridge scholar – and his students conducted fieldwork in several regions in Africa. Working near the Baringo Lake of eastern Kenya, they noted that various groups – Pokot, Tugen, and Njemps – had material traits associated with each. In the lake area, the material boundaries between the groups were not closely kept, as members of the different groups used items associated with other groups. As one moves away from the lake, however, people did maintain clearer material boundaries. While members of the different groups interacted with each other and were business partners, they did not use material items associated with a different group.⁹²

Hodder explained this difference as a result of competition for resources. Plenty of water could be found near the lake, and there was no shortage of resources. At a distance from the lake, however, water was scarce, and the groups who owned the water sources enabled access only to their members. People therefore had an interest in transmitting a clear message about their affiliation and consequently avoided items associated with other groups.

Returning to the Iron I Levant, Bunimovitz and Faust argued in a similar vein that the avoidance of Philistine pottery in sites outside their orbit was a result of ethnic boundary maintenance. There is no need to bring in chronological differences or segregation in order to understand the absence of the highly visible and symbolically loaded Monochrome pottery in places like Lachish. The ethnic importance of Philistine pottery can be seen not only in the sharp boundaries displayed by the distribution of Monochrome pottery, but also from that of the later Bichrome pottery and of other Philistine traits that will be discussed at some length in later chapters.

In sum, a sharp boundary in the use of some material items in a small geographic area can easily be explained as part of ethnic boundary maintenance resulting from competition and tension between groups. As the Philistines were invaders into a land dominated by Egypt for

⁹¹ Bunimovitz and Faust 2001. ⁹² Hodder 1982: 27–31.

centuries and are described as invaders by Ramesses III in his inscription, it is hardly surprising that Egyptians and Canaanites in the regions ruled by Egypt were uninterested in using the foreign-like pottery that symbolized the “invading” newcomers. (This is how they were apparently perceived, regardless of the historical accuracy of this view.)

Since Finkelstein based his argument for downdating the Philistine arrival in the Levant on the claim that two nearby sites cannot coexist without sharing their material traits, the information just presented pulls the rug out from under this new dating, which started the snowball rolling.

If this weren’t enough, Monochrome pottery was not discovered at Tel Batash, Gezer, or Beth-Shemesh, all much closer to Ekron than Lachish. These sites were settled continuously during the Iron I and undoubtedly existed during the period when the Philistines used Monochrome pottery. Still, the inhabitants of these sites simply did not use it. It is clear, therefore, that two sites can coexist with some pottery type popular in one but absent in another.

Still, even if the Low Chronology was “conceived in sin” as it were, this in itself does not mean that it is wrong. Nevertheless, as new findings and methods accumulate, the overall picture is not in accord with the Low Chronology, which is why most Iron Age archaeologists did not and still do not accept it.

Instead, most archaeologists work with Mazar’s approach, which he laid out as a consequence of the debate with Finkelstein, and which he called modified conventional chronology (MCC). Specifically, Mazar noted that the change from Iron I to Iron IIA was gradual and pushed the transition to around 980, instead of the commonly accepted 1000 BCE (we opt for 970; see the explanation later in this chapter).⁹³

Finkelstein’s challenge, however, led to the development of a new school, composed mostly (but not exclusively) of his students, the so-called Tel-Aviv school. While only a minority, this important group of scholars exerts influence not only in the limited field of Iron Age Levantine archaeology, but more profoundly, on biblical scholarship. As we note in Chapter 3, around the same time Finkelstein was laying the groundwork for his low chronology, biblical scholarship was riding

⁹³ For the MCC, see, for example, Mazar 2005, 2011.

a wave of skepticism. Finkelstein's view, which jettisoned the United Monarchy, fit the *Zeitgeist*, and was adopted by many such biblical scholars and subsequently changed the discourse in the field.

We cannot, within the framework of this short excursus, describe the development of the debate in great detail, but we must note that Finkelstein gradually withdrew from his low dating, coming much closer to Mazar's MCC. Still, he maintains a minimal chronological gap from it, which allows him to stick to his historical reconstruction that downplays David and Solomon.

In order to understand why Finkelstein withdrew from his more iconoclastic redating, we must introduce the new player that influenced the debate: radiocarbon dating.

INTRODUCING CARBON DATING

Given the availability of scientific methods, it is no wonder that shortly after the debate started, radiometric dating was quickly adopted on a large scale in order to solve the problem. While such dating was used before, the first to suggest a systematic project in order to solve the new debate were Ayelet Gilboa from the University of Haifa and Ilan Sharon from the Hebrew University.⁹⁴ As the debate evolved, practically all excavators provided radiometric dates, creating a huge pool that supplemented other, more traditional methods of dating.

Initially, most scholars found support for their views in the new dates, and some even suggested ultra-low chronologies. As more and more samples were dated, however, and the methodology was improved, the picture was gradually clarified.

Already at an early stage of the debate, when Mazar developed his MCC, one of its bases was a detailed carbon-dating study of the finds at Tel Rehov that he conducted together with Hendrick Bruins of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and Johannes van der Plicht of Groningen University. Subsequently, they lowered the beginning of the Iron IIA to 980 BCE and dated its end to around 830 BCE, stressing that most of the pottery of the tenth and ninth centuries remained similar (many scholars divide the Iron

⁹⁴ For example, Gilboa and Sharon 2001.

IIA into early and late, and we will refer to this division elsewhere in the book). As the debate progressed and more dates accumulated, they provided further support to the MCC and showed the Low Chronology to be mistaken.

We cannot discuss all the relevant finds, but the following highlights are worth mentioning:

- Edom. We discussed the new discoveries in Chapter 3 and will develop them further in Chapter 9. Suffice it to say here that radiometric dates from the region of Feinan and Timna support the existence of social complexity in the tenth century BCE, with fortifications, extensive trade and connection with the north, and more.⁹⁵
- Khirbet Qeiyafa. This well-known site, discussed in many places in this book, was a well-fortified settlement dated by radiocarbon dating to the early tenth century.⁹⁶
- Tel ‘Eton. A large edifice in the longitudinal four-space house style (see Excursus 6.1), probably serving as a governor’s residence, was erected at the top of the mound of Tel ‘Eton. It was dated by carbon 14 to the tenth century, most likely before its middle.⁹⁷ (The building will be discussed at some length in Excursus 6.1 and Chapter 15.)

Thus the overall picture gradually tilted toward Mazar’s MCC.

At the same time, Finkelstein also arranged his own radiocarbon studies. He initially interpreted them as fitting with the Low Chronology, and yet gradually he was forced to move toward the higher chronology. A particularly important example is the dating of Megiddo.

THE CASE OF MEGIDDO VIA: RE-REDATING ITS DESTRUCTION.

Megiddo is one of the major sites in northern Israel where several important excavations were carried out over the past century by a number of expeditions. The many finds caught the public imagination, and it appears that the site served as a model for Tel Makor in James Michener’s bestseller *The Source*.

⁹⁵ See Chapters 2, 9, 15; see also (e.g.) Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014; Ben-Yosef 2016.

⁹⁶ See throughout the book, especially Chapters 8, 15; see also Garfinkel et al. 2016, 2018.

⁹⁷ Faust and Sapir 2018, 2021.

Israel Finkelstein, David Ussishkin, and Baruch Halpern resumed large-scale excavations at the site in 1992. In his 1996 article, following his premise of a late Philistine arrival in the Levant, Finkelstein argued that Megiddo VIB should be dated to the late eleventh century/early tenth century BCE, and that the next phase, Megiddo VIA, which is the final Canaanite stratum, should be dated to “the mid-tenth century, the period of the United Monarchy. The total destruction of this stratum . . . to Shoshenq’s campaign.”⁹⁸

This is very important since it means that David could not have been responsible for the city’s destruction (as was traditionally thought) and that Solomon could not have built the very impressive Israelite city of Stratum VA-IVB. Finkelstein reiterates the importance of this conclusion in a slightly later article, and even describes it as one of the main “anchors,” determination of which will decide which chronology is more accurate.⁹⁹ “The key stratum at Megiddo is not VAIVB – widely believed to be the Solomonic city – but VIA.” As time passed and more dates accumulated, the picture was altered.¹⁰⁰

In 2011, both Finkelstein and Mazar published their own updated summaries of the chronological debate.¹⁰¹ While Mazar remained with his MCC, Finkelstein took a significant step back as far as the chronology is concerned, even if not in the historical implications of these dates.

Thus, Finkelstein admitted that some of the most significant radiometric dates from Megiddo, that of Megiddo VIA, are earlier than he suggested and that this city was destroyed in the early tenth century (which is completely in line with the MCC!).¹⁰² While Finkelstein admits as much, he did not change his historical reconstruction. Instead, Finkelstein argued that the sites could have been destroyed *during* the Iron I, and not in its end.¹⁰³ This is special pleading, as the destruction of

⁹⁸ Finkelstein 1996c: 183. ⁹⁹ Finkelstein 1998: 169, 173.

¹⁰⁰ While many challenged Finkelstein’s dating, it is noteworthy to mention Halpern (2001:463), who showed at an early stage of the debate that the low dating is impossible even from a traditional ceramic typology perspective.

¹⁰¹ Finkelstein and Piasezky 2011; Mazar 2011.

¹⁰² And he notes that the same is true for other destruction layers like Tel Qasile.

¹⁰³ Finkelstein and Piasezky 2011: 51. They point to Tel Hammah, Tel Rehov, Tel Dor, and (in other places) Tel Hadar, but Mazar disputes all of these, showing that the radiocarbon dating fits perfectly well with his MCC.

Megiddo VI is exactly what Finkelstein claimed previously is the most substantial date for the debate.

To put it differently, Finkelstein said that determining when Megiddo VI was destroyed would be a key issue in settling the debate. This seemed like a fair challenge, but once even he recognized that the date fits the traditional chronology and not his, instead of dropping the Low Chronology, he came up with a speculative way to allow it to remain, albeit on life support. Moreover, this suggestion forces him to posit an occupational gap between the destruction of Megiddo VI, around 980 BCE, and the resettlement of the city in Stratum VB around 930 BCE.¹⁰⁴ In his original Low Chronology, there was no need of such a gap, nor does Mazar need one in his MCC. Only Finkelstein makes this suggestion, since without the gap, Megiddo VB, and thus the Iron IIA, would be dated to the early-to-mid tenth century – that is, the time of the United Monarchy, exactly when Mazar dates it.

The bottom line was that Finkelstein, wishing to uphold his historical reconstruction, felt constrained to take a large step back in the dating of the Iron II levels at Megiddo (VB, VA/IVB). As such, he significantly shrank the gap between him and Mazar by suggesting that the transition between the Iron I and the Iron II was “shortly after the mid-tenth century,” adding defensively that radiocarbon dating would have difficulty dating material with sufficient precision to decide the debate.¹⁰⁵

THE NOT-SO-LOW CHRONOLOGY AND THE SUPERIORITY OF THE MODIFIED CONVENTIONAL CHRONOLOGY. Since this 2011 update, Finkelstein has continued this tendency to nudge the Low Chronology toward the MCC, even if declining to accept the consequences for his historical reconstruction. As of 2019, he dates the Early Iron IIA to the “second half of the 10th century,”¹⁰⁶ admitting that even “the early days of the *Late* Iron IIA, is radiocarbon dated to the Late 10th/early ninth century B.C.E, ca. 900 B.C.E.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, Finkelstein now dates the Late Iron IIA earlier than

¹⁰⁴ For the gradual change, see also Finkelstein 2009: 116, 2013b: 8.

¹⁰⁵ Finkelstein and Piasezky 2011: 52. ¹⁰⁶ Kleiman et al. 2019: 534 (our emphasis).

¹⁰⁷ Kleiman et al. 2019: 535, our emphasis.

what he originally dated the *beginning* of the early Iron IIA! The implications for the dating of the early Iron IIA are clear, pushing it farther and deeper into the tenth century.

Given that he views the early Iron IIA as a specific horizon with a typical, noticeable pottery, it is difficult to see how he insists on attributing this phase only some forty years or so, especially given the date of the destruction of levels such as Megiddo VI. Allowing the early Iron IIA some sixty to seventy years, as is generally expected, would put Finkelstein completely in line with the MCC, and it appears that this is why Finkelstein hangs on to dates after the mid tenth century – adopting the earlier dating would fit a historical United Monarchy, which would force him to abandon his historical reconstruction. When this is combined with the evidence from Khirbet Qeiyafa, Feinan (KEN), Tel ‘Eton, and many other sites, it becomes clear why the majority of archaeologists reject the Low Chronology and stick with the MCC.

**Box: The Contribution of Archaeomagnetic (Paleomagnetic)
Dating**

Archaeomagnetic (also known as paleomagnetic) dating is a new-comer to archaeology. This dating method is based on the convergence of two distinct observations: (1) The direction and the intensity of the Earth’s magnetic field has changed over time. (2) Some minerals, when heated above a certain temperature, are magnetized and information concerning the magnetic direction and intensity is embedded in them. Since such minerals are found in mud bricks or pottery, they can provide us with information about chronology.

Scientists realized that by examining pottery, or sometimes even walls, we can notice differences in the magnetic signature. If these walls/objects are securely dated, then we could use the identified magnetic patterns to establish new benchmarks for archaeomagnetic dating. Thus, when another mud-brick wall in an undated phase in a newly excavated site reveals similar results, we can surmise its date.

Box: (cont.)

A large study of paleomagnetic data from many sites was carried out by a group of scholars from Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University. They relied on well-dated sites to create clear archaeomagnetic benchmarks, and this helped to date less secure strata, either by showing that they are identical to these benchmarks, and hence were destroyed at the same time, or different, and hence their destruction should be attributed to different events.

The project has not yet directly addressed the question of the high/low/modified chronology, but some of its results throw indirect light on the topic, appearing to support the MCC. Consider the situation in the following three sites:

- Tel Rehov V is dated, based on radiocarbon dating, to around 900 BCE.
- At Tel Beth-Shean, a destruction level with a similar ceramic assemblage was attributed either to Shishak (ca. 920) or Hazael (second half of the ninth century, i.e., about a century later).
- At Horvat Tevet in the Jezreel Valley, a similar assemblage was unearthed in the first phase of a newly established royal estate (Level 7). The excavators dated it to the late Iron Age IIA, suggesting that this level was destroyed in the early ninth century.

And yet the archaeomagnetic results of all three sites suggest that they were destroyed in the same event. Adding the additional information about this possible event, including the radiocarbon dates, places the destruction event in the late tenth century, making the Shishak campaign the only possible candidate for all three destructions. This dating is further secured by the reference to both Tel Rehov and Tel Beth-Shean in Shishak's victory inscription, discovered in Karnak.¹⁰⁸ This dating is also in line with the MCC, and shows that the later dates suggested for some levels – for example, at Horvat Tevet – are unlikely.

¹⁰⁸ This brief discussion is based on the data in Vaknin et al. 2022, especially pages 2–4. For the Horvat Tevet material, see also Chapter 11, and see Sergi et al. 2021.

To sum up, there is little about the Low Chronology that is compelling. Its foundational arguments, first the absence of Philistine Monochrome in certain sites and then the comparison with Samaria, were themselves forced, and, in any event, have been sufficiently answered. Moreover, the accumulated radiocarbon dating pushes for an earlier tenth-century date for the Iron I–II transition, making the MCC the better chronological scheme.

As the shift from the Iron I to the Iron II (and the associated finds) is a process, perhaps lasting from 980 to 960 (or 990–950), we will use 970 as the appropriate date for the beginning of the Iron IIA (but must reiterate that every date in the first half of the tenth century BCE, up to about 950, for the beginning of the Iron IIA, would fit a historical United Monarchy).

Part II

The Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE

In the late eleventh century BCE, following a long process, most highland villages, so typical of the Israelite settlement of the Iron Age I, were abandoned. Not long after, at approximately 1000 BCE, a fortified settlement was erected on a small hill above the Elah Valley in the Judean Shephelah. Twenty or thirty years later, the large Canaanite city-state of Megiddo was destroyed. When a new, large city was erected over its ruins some time later, it was built along completely different lines, and for the first time in millennia, no temple stood in Megiddo's cultic area.

At roughly the same time, the Philistines ceased manufacturing their Aegean-inspired decorated pottery, which had characterized their ceramic assemblage for some 200 years. Also around this time, a large longitudinal four-space house was erected at the highest part of Tel 'Eton, in the southeastern Shephelah. And in central Transjordan, many villages were abandoned. Are these events and processes connected? And if so, how?

In Chapter 2, we saw how, despite the many contradictions and exaggerations we find in the narratives about Saul and David, critical reading of the text long accepted its overall narrative arc as historical and placed the *sitz im leben* of the bulk of the material in the tenth century BCE. In Chapter 3, we noted that the main reason for denying the historicity of the United Monarchy and downdating of the written sources for the book of Samuel, was based on the perception that the archaeological reality of the tenth century precludes such a kingdom and that consequently the text must derive from a later period.

This understanding of the archaeological reality drove biblical scholars to search for a different background for the stories, and this still fuels much of such scholars' historical-critical work on the text today. And yet we have seen that the archaeological understanding that underpins this skepticism was often a misunderstanding from the start and, in other cases, has proven incorrect. As we now know, nothing in the archaeological reality of the tenth century BCE is in conflict with the main tenets of the narrative in Samuel. All of this, however, does not prove the existence of the kingdom of David and Solomon archaeologically; it only shows that, contrary to the common view among biblical scholars, such a kingdom would not contradict the findings from this period.

In Part II of the book – which forms its core – we will move the argument forward, showing that a detailed study of the material evidence fits nicely with the biblical picture of an Israelite kingdom dated to this period and even implies its existence. Moreover, archaeology reveals the tenth century to be a formative period. The changes briefly described at the beginning of this text are but a few examples of the drastic changes that accompanied the transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II. The aim of this part of the book is to examine the archaeological evidence from this era, from settlement patterns (Chapter 4), through ceramic changes (Chapter 5), to regional changes (Chapters 6–12), and to show that in practically every parameter we find evidence of major transformations.

Much of the archaeological information we discuss is not new. Still, in many cases, as with the ceramic changes, the various scholars simply noted the change without attempting to explain it. In other cases, changes did receive a focused explanation, but they were not identified as part of a larger phenomenon.

The following chapters will show, however, that the changes were much broader than usually considered, and they are all different reflections of one larger process connected with the emergence of a new political body that in broad outlines equals what the Bible describes as the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon.

While some will likely argue that these phenomena do not need to be explained as deriving from one process since each can be tackled on its own, the ability to fit all these different changes into one coherent scenario strengthens the explanation's power and likelihood.

In this part, we will only demonstrate the broad changes and will not attempt a finer inner chronology or to combine the changes, nor will we compare the archaeological evidence with the biblical description at any length. All that will be done in Part III.

CHAPTER 4

Abandoned Rural Villages and the Beginning of Highlands Fortifications

THE RIDDLE: TOWARD THE END OF THE IRON I, the vast majority of the many rural villages excavated in the highlands were abandoned. At the same time, a handful of settlements began to grow into fortified towns. Why did these dramatic changes take place at the time discussed here, and what is the relationship between these two phenomena?

VILLAGE LIFE IN THE IRON I LEVANT

In the late thirteenth century, hundreds of new rural villages began to appear all over the central highlands on both sides of the Jordan River. Where these settlers came from is debated. Some believe that these settlers were pastoral nomads from outside the Cisjordan, possibly from the Transjordan, the south, or even Syria.¹

Others have suggested they were always there, living as local nomads, and that the settlements simply reflect their settling down into villages – that is, they were changing their lifestyle from that of shepherds wandering the countryside with their flocks to that of farmers living in villages (a process known as sedentation).

Still others have suggested that these settlers were refugees from the lowland cities who escaped to the highlands so as not to be under the thumbs of the ruling elite. Some scholars even suggest that the majority of the settlers were sedentary Canaanites who moved to the highlands

¹ This chapter is largely based on arguments raised in Faust 2003, 2006a, 2015a. Most of the bibliography can be found there.

and founded the new villages. Many also agree that a small group fled from Egypt, or had some encounter with the Egyptians, and joined the others.

It is likely that all reconstructions have some truth in them, but whatever the origin of this population, the highlands on both sides of the Jordan River were settled extensively in the Iron I, with villages popping up throughout the region. In the Cisjordan, the villages extended from the Galilee in the north to Judah in the south, with the north and south themselves more sparsely settled than the densely packed Samarian highlands. No evidence exists for extremely large or central settlements in these regions at this time, so we are discussing what is sometimes called a tribal or headless society.²

VILLAGE FARMING COMMUNITIES. Life in the Iron Age Levantine highlands revolved around farming communities, like Khirbet (Khirbet, Arabic for the “ruin of”) Raddana, ‘Ai, Giloh, Izbet Sartah, Khirbet Za’akuka, Tell en-Nasbeh, and others (Figure 4). These were small villages inhabited by kinship units that worked their own land. These were not the large farms with acres of land with which we are familiar today, nor were the farmers involved in commercial farming, focusing on mass production and export. This was subsistence farming, the purpose of which is for the family to grow its own food. The average village during this period was likely some 1.5–3 acres (0.5–1 hectare) in size and would have been inhabited by 40–200 people.

The villages were unfortified, although they were often surrounded by a boundary wall, and sometimes the houses clustered and formed a sort of boundary wall that defined the community and separated it from its neighbors and from the wild nature around it. Many of the houses were an early form or prototype of the longitudinal four-space house, more popularly known as the four-room house (the mature plan crystallized only later; see Excursus 6.1). These houses were divided into a number of long spaces or rooms with a broad (wide) room in the back, spanning the width of the long rooms and often sporting a second floor.

² For example, Finkelstein 1988; Dever 2003; Faust 2006a.

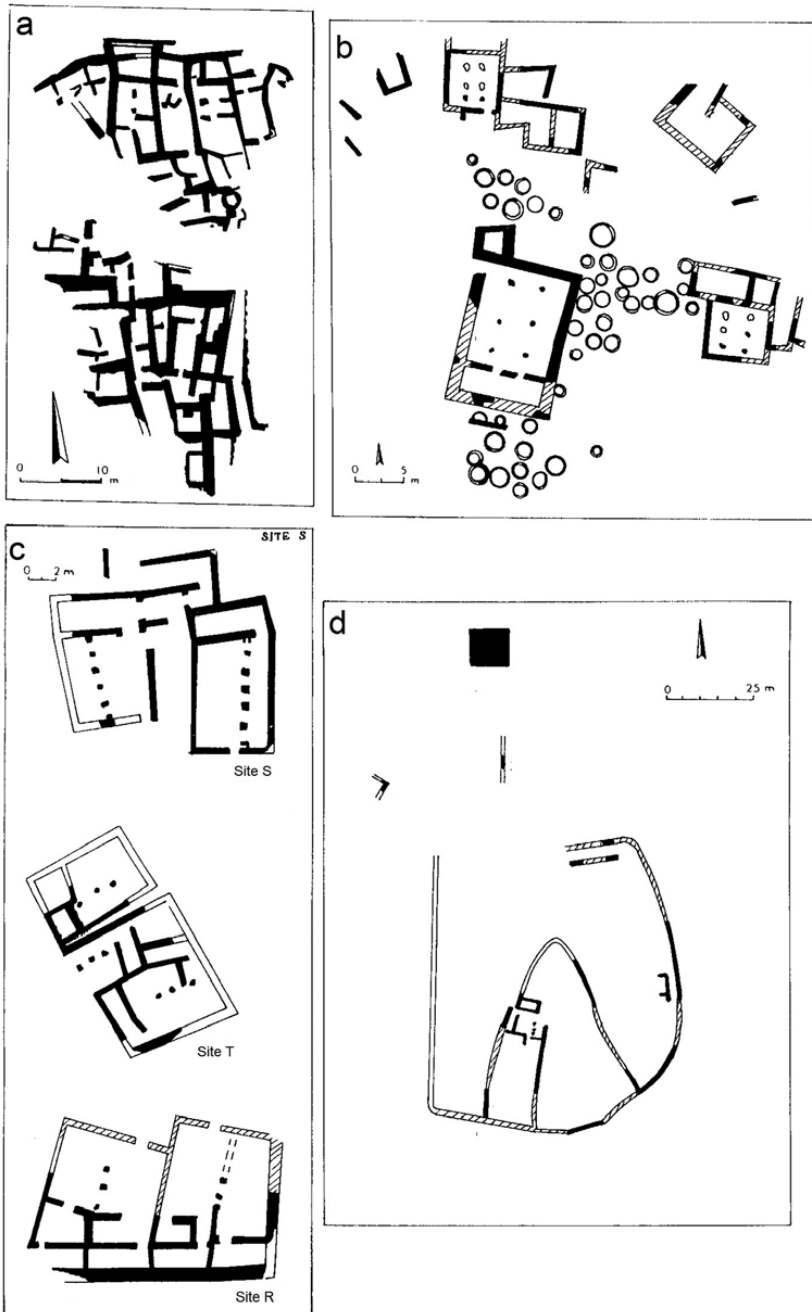


Figure 4 The architecture in a sample of Iron Age I Highland Villages: (a) The 'Ai; (b) Izbet Sartah; (c) Kh. Raddana; (d) Giloh (redrawn after Finkelstein 1988: 78, 253; King and Stager 2001: 10; Mazar 1990: 339).

Over a few generations, the population grew, and as villagers became more competent and familiar with the local ecological conditions, the villages gradually produced agricultural surpluses depending on the ecological realities of their local region: olive trees and grape vines (for oil and wine) were dominant in the central ridge and the western slopes, while grains for harvest and the use of wild grasses for grazing were dominant in the eastern and southern slopes.

While each area likely continued to grow all crops at a subsistence level, the surpluses were used for barter and to pay for specialists such as smiths and priests (this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE VILLAGES

This world changed, however, toward the end of the Iron I, around the second half of the eleventh century and the early tenth century BCE. About 200 years after settlement was initiated, most of the highland villages were abandoned.³ This did not happen overnight; the process probably took a number of generations and appears to have taken place in two major stages, which can also be distinguished geographically (Figure 5).

The first stage, which is our concern here, took place in the late Iron I – that is, mainly in the course of the eleventh century and the very beginning of the tenth century BCE, and was concentrated in the central highlands. The second stage, which will be discussed later in the book, occurred around the Iron I–Iron II transition or the very beginning of the Iron II – that is, around the first half or the middle of the tenth century BCE, and took place mainly in the areas surrounding the highlands (and on the fringe of the highlands).

³ This was noted by Mazar (1990: 338) and Dever (1997b: 182), but the scale of the phenomenon was first identified by Faust (2003). Interestingly, shortly after Faust published his article, Finkelstein (2005) disputed the mere existence of a pattern of abandonment in this period. Faust (2007) responded to Finkelstein's claims in detail, and it appears that there is now a wide agreement that large-scale abandonment did take place in the late Iron I (e.g., Bloch-Smith 2003: 410–411; Dever 2017: 270–271; SeEVERS 2020: 25; Lehmann 2021: 289; Master 2021: 213), including by some of Finkelstein's students (Sergi 2017: 11; even if Faust is often misquoted regarding the causes for the abandonment). Given the widespread agreement that the abandonment did take place, there is no reason to recapitulate the points raised in Faust's 2007 response (and again in Faust 2015a).

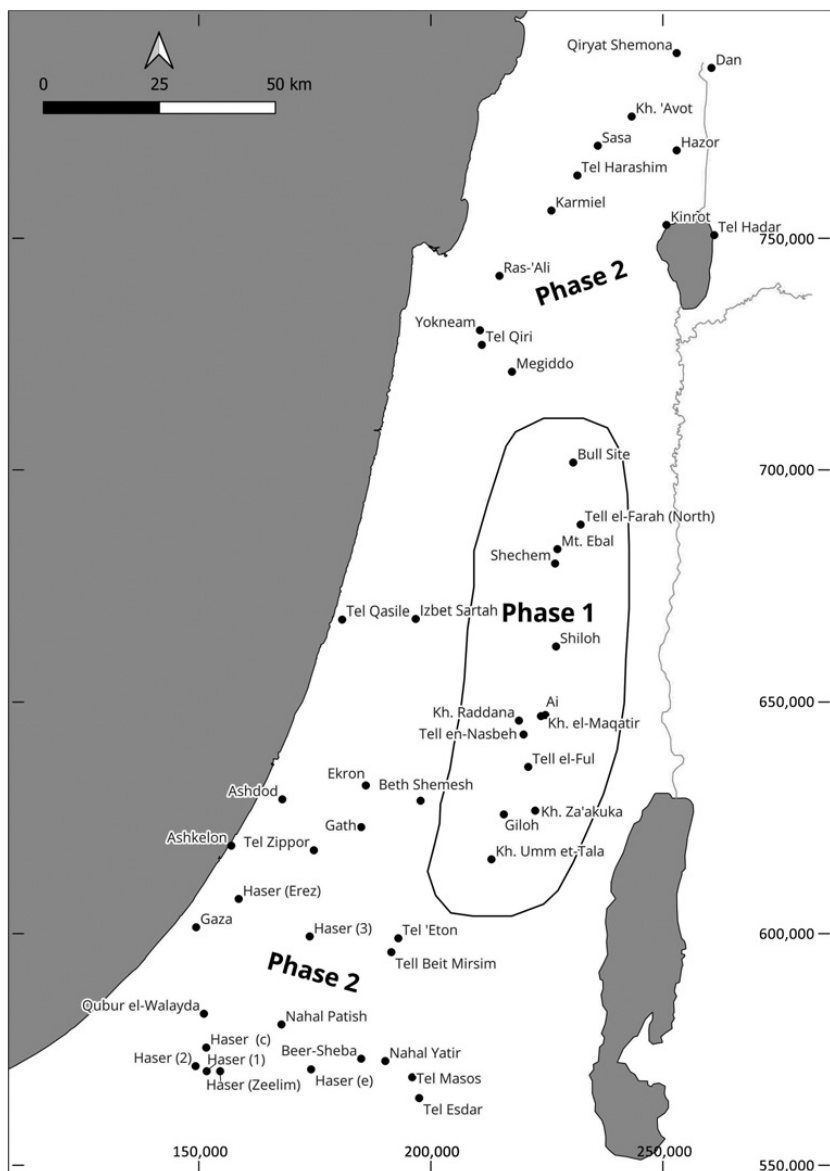


Figure 5 Map of the sites mentioned in Chapter 4, showing the schematic phases of abandonment.

To give a sense of the scope of this phenomenon, out of nearly 100 excavated Iron Age rural sites in the highlands *none* is known to have existed as a village in the tenth century. All of the excavated Iron I villages

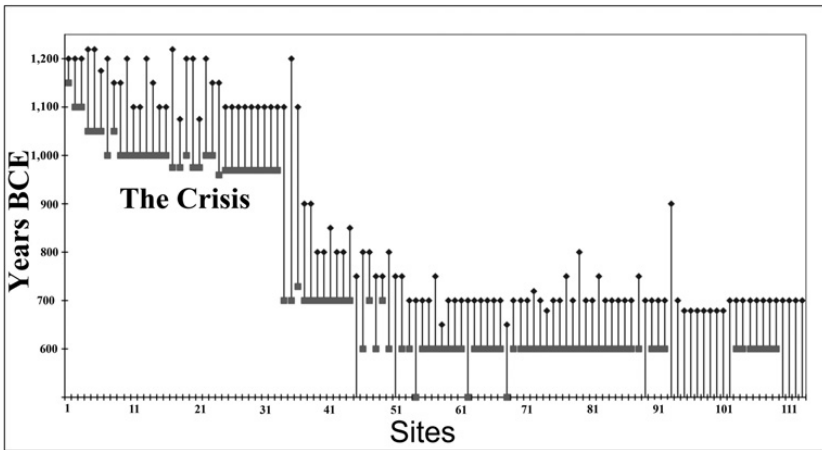


Figure 6 A graph showing Iron Age villages' dates of occupation. Note the massive abandonment at the late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II (dates are very rough, and the time of establishment is usually only an approximation).

were either abandoned (most, e.g., 'Ai, Izbet Sartah, Khirbet Raddana, Khirbet Za'akuka, Giloh, Beth-zur, and many others) or grew in size at some point in the Iron II (e.g., Bethel, Tell en-Nasbeh), but did not continue to exist as a village.

To appreciate the extent of the break in rural settlement, we note that all of the excavated Iron II villages were established *de novo* in the Iron II and do not continue the Iron I villages. Only sites that were or became central sites/towns show continuity between the two periods.⁴

Figure 6 depicts excavated Iron Age rural sites throughout the Land of Israel (including in regions discussed in subsequent chapters). Each vertical line represents a village (associated with a number at the bottom). The diamond shape at the top represents the estimated time of establishment (very roughly), whereas the square at the bottom represents the estimated date of destruction or abandonment. Note that only a few rural sites show continuity from the Iron I to the Iron II, and these are located in the northern valleys (see Chapter 11). Villages that turned into towns in the Iron II are not included in the graph.

⁴ The well over 100 rural Iron Age sites are representative of the larger whole. Still it is likely that some yet undiscovered rural sites existed continuously during the Iron I–II transition. Such future discoveries, however, will not alter the overall pattern presented here.

This means that two parallel but opposite processes took place in these Iron I villages: abandonment and growth. The former was the more common process and most of the excavated villages were entirely abandoned. The latter was less common, but a small number of these rural villages did grow to become central settlements or towns (even if they were too small to be called cities).

We do not know when these sites grew to become towns. It is possible that they were already towns by the late Iron I, though it is equally possible that they became centers only during this period of village abandonment. Some might have achieved this status only later in the early Iron II. What is clear, however, is that when the dust settled on this process, small highland villages were virtually nonexistent – rare at best – and large, more central settlements were the main type of settlement left in the highlands.

These towns are the *only* excavated sites that show continuity between the Iron I and Iron II in the highlands of Judea and Samaria. For whereas these central sites continued to grow until they became cities later in the Iron II, most of the abandoned villages were never resettled. To reiterate what was noted earlier, when the countryside was eventually resettled with villages later in the Iron II (e.g., Khirbet Jemein, Beit Aryeh, Khirbet Jarish, Khirbet er-Ras), these new sites were usually established *de novo* on virgin territory.

WHY WERE THE VILLAGES ABANDONED?

Why were the Iron I villages abandoned and where did all of the people go? Before answering this question, let us first look at the possibilities.

CLIMATE CHANGE. The most obvious reason people move – and this is well known today in light of current concerns – is climate change. During times of drought, for instance, agriculture is unable to produce enough food to sustain the population and people either die of famine or leave in order to find greener pastures, as it were.

But the highland villagers could not have abandoned their villages because of climate change, considering the growth of the central sites. Decline in precipitation leads to settlement dispersal, not nucleation.

The reason for this is self-evident: Cities are larger and have more mouths to feed, so they are generally impacted first and most strongly in famines.

Yet the village dwellers left their villages and the population concentrated in central sites that subsequently even grew in size. How would it help villagers to move into a city if the problem was that the local farms were not producing enough food?

Moreover, the farmers who moved to the cities were likely still working their family plots; all the villagers did by moving to towns was add to their daily commute. How could this possibly help them in time of famine or drought?

NOMADIZATION. Another possible explanation for abandonment is that the villagers gave up their sedentary life and became nomads. Most premodern societies in the Middle East were polymorphic, meaning that they had cultivated fields and moderate-sized herds. If, for whatever reason, pastoralism (shepherding) appeared more efficacious at a given point – due, for example, to high taxation or forced recruiting to the army or labor – these villagers could easily have turned to herding and away from agriculture.

In such times, they would leave their permanent settlements and wander in the highlands with their flocks, complementing their subsistence with seasonal farming. And if the local population were once nomads (as many scholars believe some Israelites were), they may have retained memories and practices from their former culture and the transition from agrarian to nomadic could have been accomplished relatively smoothly.⁵ If this is what happened, then the population dwelling in these highland villages during the Iron I merely gave up living in villages and working their farms and began a new life as shepherds wandering the countryside.

This suggestion doesn't really explain what happened in the highlands either. First, the idea that the entire population of settled villagers would suddenly abandon their homes to become shepherds seems rather unlikely. In fact, since, as noted earlier, society in the Iron I Levant was polymorphic – that is, people would both farm and herd – the villagers could have opted for a much less sharp lifestyle change by putting more

⁵ For example, Rowton 1976.

resources into their herds while still maintaining some baseline amount of subsistence agriculture.

Moreover, what would have led to such a nomadization? As noted, high taxation or forced recruiting to the military can have this effect, but the Iron I Levant does not appear to have had the kind of powerful central government necessary for such aggressive policies, especially in the highlands. Finally, a sudden move toward nomadization does not explain why some sites would have been expanding at this very time.

INCENTIVES IN OTHER REGIONS. Another cause for abandonment could be incentives in other regions. For example, a population may relocate to better areas that, for whatever reasons, were unavailable for settlement before. This was suggested in the past as an explanation for the (slightly later) abandonment of Izbet Sartah – one such Iron I village in the western edge of Samaria – due to the opening up of the better lands in the valley below in the early Iron II. Still, while this might have indeed been the case in the second stage of the process, which took place in the tenth century, this is no more than a partial explanation for the phenomenon.

While it is possible that some inhabitants of a village – and, in extreme cases, perhaps all of them – would leave their place of habitation and move to a better location that had now become available, it is very unlikely that this would lead to the abandonment of so many villages. Such episodes are more likely to take place (as indeed was the case in Izbet Sartah) only during the second wave of abandonment, after the formation of a polity that could offer such incentives. (We will discuss the second wave of abandonment in subsequent chapters.)

FORCED RESETTLEMENT. Sometimes ruling powers will reorganize the population when it seems useful or necessary to do so. While such reorganization may take various forms, resettling the rural population in central settlements is often the chosen pattern.

Why would a government/king do this? There could be many reasons, but first and foremost, people who live in towns and central sites are much easier to control than those spread across the landscape. This is true for tax collecting as well as for conscripting military-age males into the army.

While kings often enforce such relocations – and in a later chapter we will see that it probably happened in ancient Israel in a later stage – this is not likely to be the cause for the relocation of villagers in the late Iron I, since there was yet no strong, central government in the highland that could enforce such resettlement.

DEATH. Perhaps the villages disappeared because the population died out. We could imagine something like this occurring in three ways: famine/drought, plague, or war. In theory, any one of these three causes, in a severe enough form, could explain the disappearance of the highland rural villages in the late Iron I. Nevertheless, each possibility is problematic.

The first possibility is merely an extreme variant of what we discussed earlier in this chapter regarding climate change. As such, it suffers from the same basic flaw. If conditions became so terrible that the villagers died of hunger or thirst, how could the central sites have survived and even prospered? These centers are in the same geographic area as the villages and lived off of the same farmlands. From where would they have gotten their food? Given the density of occupation there compared with the villages, they would have been the first to be affected!

The plague possibility is unlikely for similar reasons. It is well known from history as well as medical science that plagues thrive on crowds. Thus it is almost always the case that cities are hit harder by plague than villages are. If a massive and deadly plague had struck the hill country in the late Iron I – a plague so terrible that even the villages, which otherwise tend to survive plagues, would have suffered – we should see in the archaeological record the decline or even the abandonment of central sites, not their growth.

This leaves the third possibility – that the village population was killed off in a war. As we know from Egyptian and Assyrian monumental inscriptions, campaigns through the Levant by powerful armies did occur from time to time, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Some prominent examples of these are the campaigns of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib in the late eighth century BCE, and of Nebuchadnezzar II in the seventh and early sixth centuries BCE.

But the problem is that these campaigns were generally led against cities and towns, which held more plunder and whose conquest was more strategic, not to mention prestigious. Villages may have been destroyed in

the wake of such a campaign, but they would hardly have been the focus. Moreover, we have no evidence of such a large campaign by any superpower during this period. Assyria was not yet a conquering power, the Hittites were long gone, and Egypt was focused inward. And even if such a campaign took place, why wouldn't the area have been resettled immediately after the invading army left the area?

SECURITY. Despite the problems with the war option, we should not hastily discard the possibility that an external threat was the cause of the village abandonment. Perhaps instead of looking for a massive, lightning campaign by a superpower such as Assyria, we should be thinking about a persistent struggle between the population of the hill country and a powerful yet more manageable enemy nearby – not conquest and wholesale slaughter by a mighty empire, but rather a more local threat that led to resistance and change.

The benefit of such a suggestion is that it explains both processes, the abandonment of the villages and the growth of the central settlements, simultaneously. The connection between these two processes is actually simple and intuitive: The villagers moved to the central sites because of the external threat.

If we assume that the highland population was in a state of hostility with a local power, it would make sense that such people would gradually give up living in indefensible villages and choose to live in central sites that, being large, were consequently better suited to face this threat. Whether the central sites were walled when the process began is unknown, but if not, they were certainly walled in the Iron IIA.

The Levantine highland population of the late Iron I would not be the only group in history to behave this way. For example, at Oaxaca Valley in southern Mexico, Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery note that a large city was founded in Monte Alban at about the middle of the first millennium BCE, when many villages in its vicinity were abandoned.⁶ Other studies in other parts of the world offer further examples. Indeed, in her study of similar processes of abandonment in the ancient Greek world, historian Nancy Demand concluded that such processes of relocations into large

⁶ Marcus and Flannery 1996: 140–144.

settlements are “always” the response to an external threat.⁷ But even if this is not “always” the case, and Demand somewhat overstates the point, it is certainly a very good reason for such a pattern.

Think of the inconvenience of such a move for a society living off of small farms. Many, if not most, of the people living in the towns would initially have kept their ancestral holdings and would still have gone out to their respective farms to work them. This means doubling, trebling, perhaps even quadrupling their daily commutes to work, something they would have done only if they felt they had no other choice.

Since it could not have been their own rulers that forced them to do so – as noted, the highlands had no strong central authority at this time – we are left only with the likelihood that the villagers felt the need to protect themselves from a feared enemy that could swoop in on them one night, unguarded, looting their surpluses and perhaps even raping the women and killing the men. Such an explanation falls exactly in line with the generalizations of Demand and Flannery and Marcus.

NAMING THE LOCAL THREAT: ISRAELITES VERSUS PHILISTINES

A key point supporting this hypothesis is that the highland settlers had such an enemy: the Philistines. The Cisjordanian and Transjordanian highlands were not the only areas extensively settled in the early Iron I. Around that same time, the southern part of Israel’s Mediterranean coast was settled by the Philistines, who appear to have taken control over the area from the previous Canaanite inhabitants (who probably continued to live there; see Chapter 7). According to the Bible, their main cities were Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod along the southern coast, and Ekron and Gath further inland.⁸

For a local power, the Philistines were very strong in the Iron I, and their cities were much larger than any other in the southern Levant at this time. For example, Ashkelon apparently grew to become an enormous 60 hectares, Gath reached some 50 hectares, and Ekron was some 20 hectares. Even Ashdod, apparently the smallest Philistine city (the size of Gaza is unknown),

⁷ Demand 1990: 166–167.

⁸ This is confirmed by the excavation of four of the cities. The fifth, Gaza, has not been excavated.

was more than 8 hectares large.⁹ Most of these are orders of magnitude larger than the typical Iron I highland settlement (0.4–1 hectare) or even the larger southern Levantine Canaanite cities such as Tel Rehov (10 hectares) in the Beth-Shean Valley or Megiddo (7 hectares) in the Jezreel Valley.

While during the initial stages, the Philistine settlement was restricted to the area around the Philistines' central cities, often called the Pentapolis, they gradually expanded in all directions, even beyond the coastal plain, taking over Canaanite settlements and regions, and ruling from the western Negev in the south to the Yarkon basin in the north.

Apparently, and not surprisingly, the more the Philistines' rule expanded, the more they wanted to expand. It is therefore only natural that they would have been interested in the surpluses produced in the highlands and that they wanted to assert their domination over the area, or at least to skim the cream off the top, as it were.¹⁰ But the evidence for Philistine clashes with the highland inhabitants goes beyond commonsense argumentation, and the identification of the Philistines as Israel's main enemy is supported by various forms of external, mostly archaeological evidence.¹¹

Groups do not exist in isolation, and it is well known in anthropology that one group will often define itself in contrast to another group (or groups) in a process that anthropologists refer to as boundary maintenance. A careful look at the archaeological record suggests that the highland population – that is, the Israelites – defined themselves in contrast to the Philistines.

We will elaborate on this later in the book, but should briefly note that these contrasts are expressed through various cultural traits, and the following are but two examples:¹²

Pork Consumption. The highland villages demonstrate an almost complete lack of pork. The Philistine sites, in contrast, show that the Philistines consumed an enormous amount of pork, even increasing its percentage in their diet over the years, peaking exactly at the time

⁹ For summaries, see Stager 1995; Yasur-Landau 2010; see also various papers in Killebrew and Lehmann 2013; Fischer and Borge 2017.

¹⁰ Also Master 2021 and Chapter 15.

¹¹ This is of course also in line with the biblical tradition, which paints the Philistines as Israel's main enemy at the time. The biblical traditions and their relations with the material evidence will be discussed in Chapter 15.

¹² See extensive discussion in Faust 2006a, 2015b, 2015c, 2019c, and references there in.

discussed here. Notably, pork consumption in most Philistine sites declined later in the Iron II, suggesting that the timing of the contrast between the two groups – when both used pork consumption or avoidance to demarcate their differences – was the late Iron I.

Pottery. Whereas the Philistines used highly decorated pottery, the Israelites used simple, undecorated pottery. In most Israelite sites, not a single Philistine decorated sherd was unearthed. Here too the Philistines increased their use of decorated pottery over the course of the Iron I, clearly demarcating the boundary between the two groups before completely abandoning this pottery in the Iron IIA.

The contrast between the two cultures is clear and stark (additional traits will be discussed in Chapter 15), and it suggests competitive interaction between them that led the groups to define themselves in relation to each other.

The late Iron I represents the zenith of Philistine power and influence in the region. With such a potent threat looming over them, it is no wonder that the local settlers would have begun to feel that safety in numbers was a preferable choice. This, then, seems to be the most likely explanation for the dual processes described in this chapter: the settlers abandoned their villages and concentrated themselves in a handful of central sites to protect themselves from the Philistines. As a result, these sites became larger villages and towns, and eventually, at some point during the Iron IIA, they became cities.

SPOTLIGHT ON TELL EN-NASBEH

Tell en-Nasbeh, commonly identified as biblical Mitzpah, is perched upon a three-hectare mound north of Jerusalem (Figure 7). William F. Badè excavated the site almost in its entirety in the 1920s and 1930s. Given the time of the excavations, the publication was partial, so the material was subsequently analyzed by several scholars, mainly Jeffery Zorn. No architecture has been attributed to Iron I Tell en-Nasbeh (Stratum IV) other than the installations, which consist mainly of rock-cut silos for storing grain and cisterns for storing water.

According to Zorn, the population of Tell en-Nasbeh ballooned in the early Iron II (Stratum 3c). Zorn attributes the foundation of the new town at



Figure 7 An aerial image of Tell en-Nasbeh (from Wikipedia, created by Daniel Zvi דניאל צבי) (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tel_a-Nasba.jpg).

Tell en-Nasbeh to the former inhabitants of the site, suggesting that “perhaps other small villages in the immediate vicinity, fearful for their own safety, joined in the project and swelled the population of the settlement.”¹³ This is, of course, in complete agreement with the scenario we outlined earlier.

As became standard in highland sites, the houses of this town were arranged along the contours of its hills, with lines of houses snaking back and forth in curvilinear fashion in what is called a ring-road plan. Tell en-Nasbeh designed the back row of houses along the periphery of the mound so that their backs would be adjacent to each other and form a kind of protective wall. This is reminiscent of what came to be known as a casemate wall system, which consisted of two thin, parallel walls with empty space between them. According to Zorn, the population of this town was probably around 1,000 people, although the numbers might have been somewhat higher given the crowding of the population.

While one can challenge the exact time when the town was developed at the site, we have quite convincing evidence that by the early ninth century, a new well-fortified and massive city wall was erected there (Stratum 3b),

¹³ Zorn 1993: 112–113, also page 115.

which could be entered only through a double gate complex.¹⁴ This clearly suggests that the modest town was in place before that, thus dating the beginning of the process to the late Iron I, and its peak to the early Iron IIA, is most probable.

These observations offer a glimpse of the enormous change that centralization and urbanization wrought in ancient Israel. The culmination of the process occurred long after the period we are discussing, but the impetus for Tell en-Nasbeh to go from a village into a town begins with the abandonment process of the highland villages and the move to central sites.

SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE NEW CENTRAL SITES

Even though the daily labor of many of these highland villagers would have remained the same after they relocated, life in a town is quite different than life in a village, and the movement therefore facilitated additional socioeconomic changes.¹⁵

ECONOMIC SPECIALIZATION. First, a larger population makes large-scale or even permanent economic specialization possible. In a rural village, everyone farms, as there is not enough work to be done to make any other form of specialization workable.

Take smithing, for example. Clearly, farmers would always have needed the services of a blacksmith for their farming utensils such as plows and sickles, as well as daggers for defense and knives for cutting meat. All of these would need to be forged and periodically sharpened or repaired. Yet no one village would have had enough work at any given time to support a full-time blacksmith. Instead, one blacksmith would have served a region. He may have lived in one of the villages, but either people would travel to him with their requests or (more often) he would wander around itinerantly from village to village.

One may surmise that priestcraft worked the same way. Villagers would have had the need for religious figures to help with proper ceremonies, whether for holidays, lifecycle events, or illness, but a village of 40–200

¹⁴ Zorn 1997: 102.

¹⁵ For example, Demand 1990: 3; Marcus and Flannery 1996: 158; Arkush 2018: 17.

inhabitants could not possibly generate enough work for a full-time priest. Most religious needs would be fulfilled by a local elder or healer, who spent only a small part of his (or, in healers' case, also her) time on it. We must assume that "higher" religious positions were filled by itinerant specialists, the same way that early modern rural America had itinerant preachers running the circuit of small churches in a given region. And during holidays or special events, some villagers likely visited more central cult sites.

In towns, however, once a population gets sufficiently large, enough work becomes available for these specialized laborers to stay put and serve the local population. Thus towns would have had blacksmiths, priests, pottery and textile makers, and a host of other specialists, although the vast majority of the population would still engage in agriculture.

SOCIAL CHANGES. The concentration of population in one place led to social changes and altered the relations between individuals and groups. Demand notes that such concentration leads to an increase in intellectual life. In describing the types of changes undergone in these circumstances, Elizabeth Arkush wrote:¹⁶ "Building defensive communities posed special problems of crowding, cooperation, trust, the integration of newcomers and options constricted by the threat of violence. The solutions to these problems had long-term social and political ramifications."

THE EMERGENCE OF LEADERS. Another major change was in the realm of leadership. In villages, political leadership was not a full-time job. Of course, each village needed some kind of leadership group since problems arose unexpectedly that needed quick solutions. Nevertheless, these leaders would not have done this in lieu of farming, but rather as an added responsibility on top of farming. This is also a reason that the leaders were generally the elders, since, in addition to the wisdom of years, older people would have been less able to perform the heavy labor of farming and would thus have more time to deal with village matters. Rule in such settlements is based to a large extent on social norms and on the consent of the ruled.

Matters are quite different, however, in a large town or city. The larger number of families increases the likelihood of specialized leadership, just

¹⁶ Demand 1990: 3; Arkush 2018: 17.

like that of specialized priesthood or other professional specializations. Moreover, the fact that these families did not all belong to the same (real or imagined) kinship unit made the management of even pedestrian tasks such as the daily operation of the settlement increasingly difficult for the traditional social groups. Thus the need for strong leadership became pressing.

Even so, the move from voluntary village elders to a “paid” leadership class is counterintuitive, at least at first. A smith is paid on a *quid pro quo* basis; his job is clear and the benefits such as a new sword or a fixed plow are quantifiable and tangible. The same is more or less true of priests as well, who perform sacrifices or burials on a person’s behalf and would be paid for their time.

But a leader’s job is less tangible, and he is often not working for a given individual at any one time, at least not in an obvious way. For this reason, not everyone would have immediately agreed to collectively hire a leader and pay him. Even so, the same factor that led to the concentration of population – the external Philistine threat – made the need for a leader real and immediate. This would have eased the way for the local population to make the necessary concessions (e.g., giving some of their surpluses away as taxes to pay for the new leadership).

But how would such a leader be chosen? One would imagine that each kinship group would want one of their own to be chosen. Inevitably, this would have led to debates and instability, at least in the short term, and to the rise of competing factions, each with its own leader. From the various local leaders in the different settlements, the more powerful and charismatic leaders managed to enlarge their influence by creating alliances, and hence became leaders of larger areas, which were better fitted to face the threat. In the end, a central leader would eventually emerge, peacefully or not.

Leaders were not chosen democratically of course, but they were chosen.¹⁷ It is likely that several charismatic leaders competed, and in the end, one managed to outfight or outmaneuver the others and became the local leader. This, in turn, changed the nature of the conflict with the Philistines.

¹⁷ It is likely that under such circumstances some sort of consent was required by the population; see also Chapters 14 and 15.

As long as the highland population was small, disorganized, and dispersed, even petty groups of organized Philistine warriors could extract “taxes.” The concentration of people in central settlements was the beginning of a gradual process, most likely initiated as a defensive measure against the external threat, but this concentration in larger towns created a situation that enabled the new leadership to oppose this threat much more efficiently. Leadership therefore developed mostly in the areas close enough to the threat to have had a pressing need to resist it on one hand, but in which population was dense enough to enable such resistance on the other.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIRST FORTIFICATIONS IN THE HIGHLANDS.

While the Iron I villages did not have defensive walls and, at most, had their houses built jointly so as to create a boundary wall, in the late Iron I, a few fortified sites emerged in the highlands. Tellingly, they were concentrated in southern Samaria.¹⁸

We have already discussed Tell en-Nasbeh, and it appears that the first fortifications there were erected in the late Iron I as part of the discussed process. An additional such site is Tell el-Ful, probably the biblical Gibeon or Gibeon Shaul (the Hill of Saul). Here, fortifications were apparently built in the late Iron I (although their exact plan can be debated). It appears that fortifications were also built quite early in Gibeon, even if the exact timing is debated.

An additional fortified site was erected at Khirbet ed-Dawwara. This is a relatively small site located on the desert fringe of Benjamin. Despite its small size, the site was surrounded by massive walls, which many scholars consider the earliest examples of Iron Age fortification in the highlands.

The site existed for a very short time: It was established during the eleventh century BCE and ceased to exist at some point during the tenth century – that is, it was established when other villages were abandoned, and it existed in a time when virtually no villages existed in the highlands. As for the nature of the site, Israel Finkelstein, the excavator, noted that no grain silos or sickle blades, both of which are always unearthed in agrarian sites, were found in it.

¹⁸ Faust 2006a, 2006b, with literature.

Why was such a small and isolated site fortified, why was it located in this remote location, and why was it established at the time when so many other sites were abandoned? Finkelstein raised the possibility that the site was a military outpost. Although he has since withdrawn from this suggestion, we believe it remains preferable to other interpretations.

It seems reasonable to suggest that Khirbet ed-Dawwara was built by one of the highlands' emerging leaders in a relatively remote area to avoid detection by the enemy. This was not a village or even a town, but a sort of outpost that served a defensive purpose during this period of conflict. The establishment of such a site underscores both the severity of the external threat and the emergence of local institutions that managed the threat and resisted it.

That the first known Iron Age fortifications in the highlands emerged in southern Samaria – in what is called the land of Benjamin – supports the attribution of the external threat role to the Philistines. The Judean highlands to the south were more sparsely settled and apparently could not fully resist the Philistines. Northern Samaria was far from the Philistines' base. The area of Benjamin is close enough to the Philistines to require extreme measures to resist them while having a large enough population to make effective resistance possible. It is likely not a coincidence that the Bible credits Benjamin with the emergence of the monarchy and paints the Benjaminite king Saul's greatest challenge as dealing with the Philistine threat.

In the following chapters, we will review additional changes that took place during the transition to the Iron II, most of which took place slightly later, in the Iron II's early decades. And while we will not connect the dots at this stage – this will be done only in Part III of the book – we will see that the impact of the emergence of the monarchy in the highlands can explain them all.

CHAPTER 5

Ceramic Repertoire and Social Change in Philistia and Israel

THE RIDDLE: IRON AGE ARCHAEOLOGISTS working with material from ancient Israel have long noticed dramatic changes in pottery styles during the transition from the Iron I to the Iron II. The Aegean-inspired Philistine pottery that dominated the southern coastal plain during the Iron I completely disappeared in the tenth century BCE, as did the once pervasive collared rim jar of the highlands. Slip and burnish, rare in the Iron I, became extremely popular, and the limited ceramic repertoire that characterized the Iron I highland settlements grew significantly. Finally, in the Negev Highlands sites, a simple form of handmade pottery became very dominant. How do we explain these drastic changes all taking place at approximately the same time?

ANCIENT PEOPLE AND THEIR POTS

Anyone who has visited an archaeological site in the Levant is familiar with the ubiquitous presence of pottery sherds. The sherds one finds on the face of a mound are a mishmash of styles, vessel types, and historical periods.¹

Several factors make pottery sherds the most common finds in archaeological sites. For one, ceramic vessels are cheap and hence were widespread and in common use. For another, they break easily but cannot be mended and are therefore constantly replaced; being cheap

¹ This chapter contains various arguments, many of which were previously published in a few separate articles, especially Faust 2002, 2006a, 2015b, and most of the bibliography can be found there.

makes replacing them relatively easy. Finally, they do not disintegrate like other materials (e.g., wood and even various metals) and therefore archaeologists find them in large quantities.

The fact that they are short-lived, as well as easy to produce and manipulate, means that the style changes constantly, producing variation across space and time. Each period and each region had its own unique style of vessels.

Archeologists take advantage of this widespread find for various purposes, the most obvious of which is dating. In the early stages of research, archaeologists identified strata – that is, levels that were super-imposed one on top of the other over time – and differentiated them. They noticed that each level had its own set of vessels.

As more data from more levels and more sites accumulated, archaeologists were able to create graphs marking the development of various vessels over time, and also map their distribution across space. In most cases, the changes in ceramic styles were gradual, and archaeologists could see how a given type made its appearance at some point, slowly gained popularity until a peak period, and then tapered off to be replaced by new designs in later levels.

Learning the sequence of styles enables only relative dating, determining what preceded what; on its own, it does not allow for absolute dating. Nevertheless, archaeology learned to do this as well, based on collating what was learned about the pottery with other information.

To explain, pottery is almost always accompanied by other finds. From time to time, these other finds can give us an absolute date. For example, when a group of coins, dated to the years 40–70 CE, is found on the floor of a destroyed building, we can conclude that the house was destroyed in or around 70 CE, and if the house was in Judea, we can assume that it was destroyed during the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66–70 CE.

Likewise, Egyptian artifacts with names of pharaohs (called cartouches), whose date is known, can also date a level to a certain period. Recent generations of archaeologists have also begun to make use of hard sciences for dating finds, the best known of which is carbon 14 dating. Other techniques, such as paleomagnetism (see Excursus 3.1),

also enable archaeologists to give certain strata, and its associated ceramic assemblages, an absolute date. Moreover, once a certain ceramic assemblage is dated to a particular era in one site, we can extrapolate to similar assemblages in other sites, even if no additional information regarding its date is available there.

The study of ceramics, however, contributes much more to our understanding of ancient societies than just establishing chronology. For one, it can teach us about the technology available to the various societies that produced the vessels. Moreover, when excavating a house, determining what types of pottery were found in each room can help us understand how the different rooms within a house were used, what archaeologists call use of space, as well as how households at large functioned – that is, social organization and structure. Pottery, therefore, is instrumental in the study of families, communities, and larger social structures.

In addition to all this, pottery can teach us a great deal about a society's values and ideology. People design their plates, cooking ware, and storage jars with multiple values in mind. Certainly, utility is of prime importance, but aesthetics and even ideology play a role. In England, for example, during the time of the Puritan revolution, potters continued to produce the same pots as before, but, for a time, they were plain and undecorated. Only after the restoration were the pots decorated again. As far as we know, there was no law against decorating pottery, but this was the Puritan spirit of the time, and it influenced the material world.²

Differences can be seen not only across time, as in this example, but also across space, between different economic systems, political units, and social classes and ethnic groups with different norms and values. Thus the quality of workmanship, whether the pottery is local or imported, whether sites in a given region have the same or different styles – all these factors and more tell us a great deal about the culture. In the case of the transition between the Iron I and the Iron II, the pottery assemblage has an important story to tell.

² Noel-Hume 1974: 108; see also Deetz 1996: 81.

IRON I POTTERY

The pottery of the Iron I in the Land of Israel is characterized, first and foremost, by sharp regional differences within the country.³ The ceramic assemblage in the Philistine cities of the southern coastal plain, mainly Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Ashdod, is dramatically different from the assemblages in the areas of the Israelite settlement in the highlands, and these also differ from the assemblages in the eastern Shephelah and the northern Negev areas as well as from assemblages in the northern valleys. Some types of pottery are common to all regions, of course, but the assemblages vary greatly.

Philistia: Although a large percentage of the Iron I pottery in Philistia, such as the cooking pots, is local, much of it is Aegean in style. When the Philistines settled the region in the early Iron I, regardless of their exact place(s) of origin, they were used to Aegean-style pottery and continued to manufacture it, albeit with changes, after they settled down. Consequently, this Aegean-inspired pottery comprises a significant percentage of the Philistine ceramic assemblages in this region.

During their first phase of settlement, they manufactured what is known as the locally produced Mycenaean IIIc1 pottery, also known as Monochrome pottery, because it was decorated with one color (Figure 8). This was later replaced by the Philistine Bichrome pottery (decorated in two colors; see Figure 18). The Aegean origins of the Monochrome and Bichrome pottery can be seen clearly, although other influences were inevitably absorbed over the years. As time progressed, the percentage of the Philistine pottery in the assemblages in Philistia increased, reaching more than 50 percent in some central Philistine sites toward the end of the Iron I.

The area outside Philistia, however, tells a different story. The use of Monochrome pottery was limited to a few Philistine centers, but the Bichrome was used, even if in small quantities, by some Canaanite communities in the lowlands. At the same time, this pottery style was avoided in the highlands almost entirely, as we will see, and even by some communities in the northern coastal plain.

³ Faust 2006a and references; for the overall patterns, see also Dothan 1982; Finkelstein 1988; Mazar 2019: 128–136, 172–173.

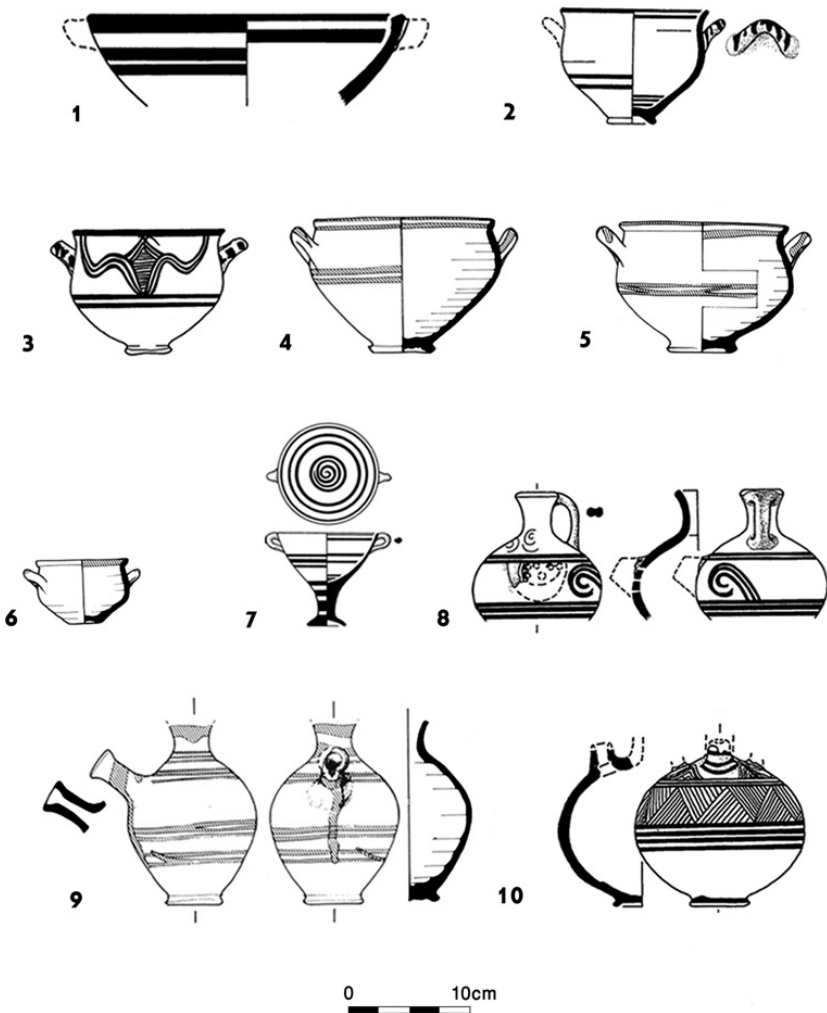


Figure 8 Sample of Monochrome pottery from Ekron (vessels 1–3, 8, and 10) and Ashdod (vessels 4–7 and 9) (redrawn after Ben-Shlomo 2006, figs. 1.17:2, 1.18:6; Dothan and Zuckerman 2004, figs. 6.14, 8.7, 30.1, 31.2; Dothan and Porath 1993, figs. 14:12, 22, 23, 15:4; for more details, see also Faust 2015c, table 1).

The Highlands (and Lowlands). Most pottery forms in the highlands show clear development from the Late Bronze (LB) (Canaanite) forms found in the lowlands. The differences reflect standard evolutionary development such as the rounding of the Iron I cooking-pot rims from the sharper more triangular shapes of the LB forms.

That said, the Iron I highland assemblage has a number of distinct attributes:

Repertoire. The highland repertoire was extremely limited, exhibiting only a handful of forms: storage jars – mostly large pithoi of the collared rim type, to be discussed later in this chapter – and cooking pots make up the vast majority. Bowls and kraters were relatively common, while jugs and juglets appear in small quantities. In contrast, both the LB and the Iron Age I lowland repertoires had much more variation within these forms, and also included chalices, perhaps for wine, and pilgrim flasks and pyxides for unguents and cosmetics.

Collared Rim Jars. The collared rim jar (CRJ) was especially significant. These vessels dominated the highland assemblages not only because they comprised a large percentage of it (e.g., 34 percent at Giloh), but also due to their size – usually more than one meter high. This means that they were very dominant in the households and their presence was extremely noticeable (Figure 9).

Local Variation. Although the assemblage is limited insofar as types of vessels, the exact appearance of each type differs markedly between regions. The reason for this is because pottery was locally made, with each region preferring one variation or another and the local potters producing objects according to this local taste. As Israel Finkelstein wrote, “the strictly local nature of the ceramic manufacture led to the great variety of subtypes within each category.”⁴

No Imports. The highland assemblage has almost no imported pottery, or even locally made foreign style pottery, such as the Philistine pottery. In the lowlands, however, they did use import Philistine-decorated Bichrome Ware – not a lot, but some.

No Painted Decoration. The highland ceramic assemblage is entirely undecorated (as far as paint is concerned). We already noted that the highlanders neither imported nor copied the Philistine Ware, but they also did not decorate their own pottery at all. In the non-Philistine lowlands, the situation was again different, and although the majority of the pottery was undecorated, they did decorate some of their pottery. The quantities

⁴ Finkelstein 1988: 274.

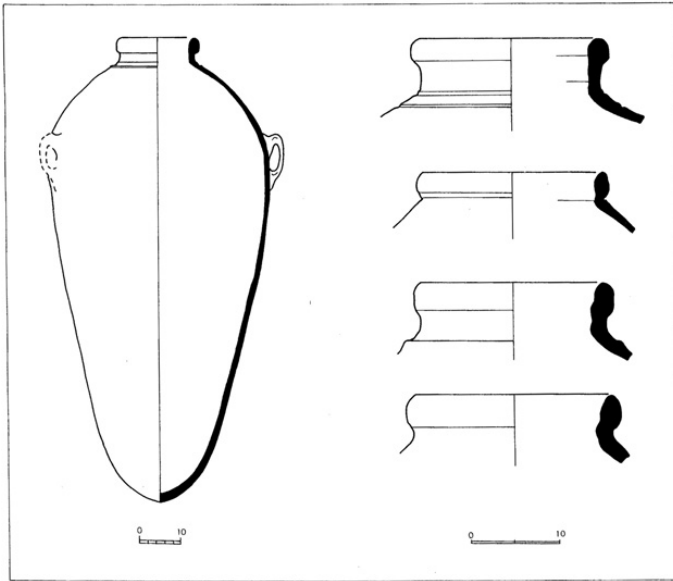


Figure 9 A complete collared rim jar and a few rims from Shiloh (redrawn after Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993, figs. 6.51/4, 6.57/3, 5, 7, 9).

are not large, but the difference between this and the almost complete absence of decorated ware in the Iron I highlands is noticeable.

IRON II POTTERY

Many ceramic forms exhibit continuity during the Iron I–Iron II transition. Moreover, even some traditions, such as the Israelites’ aversion to decorating their pottery and to using imports, continued. Nevertheless, the overall changes in the ceramic traditions are staggering.⁵

1. **Significant Decrease in Regional Variation:** The regional differences that characterized the Iron I diminished greatly (see also points 3 and 5), and the ceramic forms became more similar across regions. We will elaborate on this later in this chapter.
2. **Increase in the Variety of Forms in the Highlands:** In the highlands, and in the Israelite regions at large, a greater variety of forms emerged. The

⁵ For example, Barkay 1992: 353–354; Dever 1997a; for discussion and references, see Faust 2006a, 2019d, 2021.

percentage of cooking pots and storage vessels decreased and other forms, such as bowls and kraters, became more common and much more varied in terms of their subtypes. Israel Finkelstein nicely summarized the stark change in the nature of the highland pottery assemblage between the Iron I and the Iron II: "The ceramic industry of the Iron II period in the hill country was, in many respects, the diametric opposite of its Iron I predecessor. The number of different types was greater, but within each type, the vessels were remarkably uniform, with few subtypes and variants."⁶

3. **Disappearance of the Collared Rim Jar:** Another drastic change in the pottery of the highlands is that the huge CRJ that dominated the Iron I households simply disappeared (at least west of the Jordan) in the early Iron II.
4. **Massive Use of Slip and Burnish:** Another major change, typical throughout the country – even if to varying degrees – is the outer treatment of vessels with slip and burnish (Figure 10). Slipping the vessel involves dipping it before the firing in a lotion made of various clays, and this gives it color. The color of the slip depends on the clay as well as the addition of other coloring agents to the slurry; in the Iron II, it was usually red or orange. In burnishing, the potter rubs the vessel before firing it and thus produces a glossy surface. Unburnished pottery, in contrast, has a matte or coarse appearance. Slip and burnish, therefore, change the color of the vessels and give it some polish. The processes of slip and burnish were known long before the Iron Age, but its usage varied from rare to common depending on the period and society. In the Iron I, slip and burnish were rare. This changes in the Iron IIA, where we find red slip and hand burnish as common features of bowls, as well as jugs and juglets. Storage jars and cooking pots, however, remained unburnished and uncolored.

The percentage of slip and burnish is not uniform throughout the region, but in comparison to the situation in the Iron I, a dramatic increase is typical of the entire country (see Table 1).⁷ After the peak in the Iron Age IIA, the percentage of slip and burnish gradually decreases.

⁶ Finkelstein 1988: 274. ⁷ The table is based on Mazar 1998: 375.

TABLE 1 Burnished Pottery Table (Based on Amihai Mazar)

Site	Iron I	Tenth Century
Tel Qasile	7.9% (stratum XIII, twelfth century)	30.8% (stratum IX, tenth century)
Ashdod	0% (strata XII–XI, twelfth–eleventh centuries)	35% (late tenth century)
Tel Batash	7.8% (Iron I)	48.5% (tenth century)
Gezer	2.7% Stratum XII (twelfth century BC)	35.2% stratum VIII (tenth century BC)
Beersheba	20% in stratum IX (late eleventh century)	37% in stratum VIII (tenth century)



Figure 10 A slipped and burnished bowl from Tel 'Eton (photographed by Avraham Faust).

5. **Philistine Pottery:** After comprising some 40–50 percent in many sites in late Iron I Philistia, the Aegean-inspired Philistine pottery disappeared completely in the tenth century BCE. Ashdod Ware, a new and completely different type of decoration, then developed in the region, but it is much rarer by comparison to what Bichrome Ware was in the previous century. The Ashdod Ware decoration is not derivative of Aegean style, but is rather Phoenician or Cypriot in inspiration. Also in stark contrast

to the Philistine pottery, which applied its decorations mainly to vessels used in drinking, the Ashdod Ware decoration was applied mainly to closed vessels (i.e., storage vessels).

6. **Negbite Ware:** In the Negev Highlands, in a series of new semi-fortified sites (discussed in Chapter 9), a completely different style was adopted. While some of the changes described previously can be understood as developments or advances, here, a coarse, undecorated, handmade pottery was adopted en masse, reaching almost 50 percent of the assemblage in many sites. While not a new form – such pottery always comprised a small percentage of the assemblage in various southern sites – the use of such pottery ballooned in the Iron IIA Negev. This is in stark contrast not only to earlier (and later) uses of this pottery, but to the rest of country, where pottery was not only wheel-made, but also became more elaborate and uniform at this time.

How do we explain all these changes?

HIERARCHY AND SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

In theory, several competing explanations for each of these changes could be offered, and when discussing each phenomenon in isolation it might, perhaps, be difficult to assess the different scenarios and decide between them.⁸ Nevertheless, since all of these changes took place at approximately the same time, the chances that they were all completely unrelated are very low. Hence, rather than raising six different explanations, one for each phenomenon, and then trying to combine them somehow, we should look for one explanation that can account for all the changes (as per Occam's razor, or the principle of parsimony). In this case, there does seem to be one factor that can explain all of these changes, namely the emergence of a polity in the highlands, which brought about cultural and even political interconnectedness between regions and a drastic increase in social complexity.

⁸ Faust 2002, 2006a, and references.

1. Decreased regional differences and increased uniformity in forms.

The decline in the local, regional production traditions is simple to explain. In the Iron I, the highlands and lowlands represented distinct cultures; the Philistines were dominant in the southern coastal plain, the Canaanites were dominant in the lowlands, especially in the northern valleys and the northern coastal plain, whereas Israelite villages dominated the highlands. Differences could have resulted from partially separated economic systems and, moreover, these groups deployed various traits, including some forms of pottery, to demarcate the boundaries between them.

By the Iron IIA, however, an emerging highland polity came to dominate not only the highlands but also much of the lowlands (we will discuss this in a later chapter). Many of the Canaanite centers either made alliances with it and gradually integrated into it or were conquered by it.⁹ Part of the Canaanite population gradually assimilated into the dominant Israelite group, especially in the Shephelah. And although other Canaanite groups, including many of the inhabitants of the northern valleys, maintained a separate identity, the level of boundary maintenance decreased. In other words, they maintained their differences but without stressing them as they had done before.

The Philistines took a similar path. While clearly maintaining a separate identity, they changed their strategy of boundary maintenance and did not stress the differences as before (see more in point 5 of this chapter, and especially Chapter 7).

The growing political domination of the highland polity on one hand, and the changes in the strategy of boundary maintenance of many of the other groups on the other, brought about a significant decrease in regional differences, making the ceramic horizon of the Iron II appear much more homogenous than the previous one. Additionally, the uniform look of much of the pottery results from the existence of larger and more centralized production centers and improved trade connections, both of which were likely a result of the emergence of the monarchy as well.

⁹ For alliances and integration, see, for example, the Shephelah (Chapter 6); for conquest, see, for example, Megiddo (Chapter 11).

2. A Larger Ceramic Repertoire. Ceramics are, of course, utilitarian, but they also have many symbolic aspects and the distinction between these two uses is not always clear. We have already noted that pottery helps distinguish boundaries between ethnic groups, and this is also true for social classes. In some societies, for example, only the upper classes hold formal meals during which they entertain guests from outside the family, and hence dinner sets will be found only in upper-class houses.

The more social groups exist, the more pottery is needed to convey differences. The larger variety of pottery forms in the highlands assemblage is therefore most likely a reflection of the growing number of groups and classes within this society. The growth in social complexity in the highland polity brought with it social hierarchy and the accumulation of wealth among the upper class. The increase in variety is therefore not directly caused by political complexity, but by something that comes together with it, namely social hierarchy and the accumulation of wealth.

Let us clarify this point further: Rural villages, which dominated the highland landscape in the Iron I, had very limited social hierarchy; there were no real rich people, and a very limited leadership class. The village elders functioned as the leadership, but they were part of their extended families and did not form a different class. Even though some families may have owned more or less land than other families, they did not accumulate wealth in any way comparable to that which occurred in large cities with complex economies.

For these reasons (and perhaps others), the repertoire of vessels in the Iron I highlands is limited, or in Dever's word, "utilitarian."¹⁰ The Israelite villagers made what they needed for storage, cooking, and basic food service. In the Iron IIA, however, with Israelites beginning to live in towns and cities as opposed to rural villages, social hierarchies began to emerge and wealth began to accumulate. In such societies, it is natural for the more wealthy and upper class to use more items, especially when it comes to food service. (Think of modern-day china, silver cutlery, and tea sets.)

We must stress that the pottery itself is still simple and undecorated (other than the slip and burnish), in line with the social ethos, but the

¹⁰ Dever 1995: 205.

larger number of forms enabled the pottery to serve in more settings and for more purposes, which were now required by the more complex society of the Iron IIA.

3. Collared Rim Jars. Despite the overall increase in the number of forms in the highlands, the CRJ disappeared. To understand why these massive storage jars were the one item to have been discontinued in the Iron IIA highlands, at a time when the ceramic repertoire was growing, we need to understand the meaning and purpose of these jars that made them so ubiquitous in the Iron I highland settlements.¹¹

Iron I society was kinship based, and the key unit was not the nuclear family but the extended family or even the lineage, perhaps something similar to the Arabic *hamula*. The massive CRJs, which comprised a significant percentage of the finds in many sites and were ubiquitous in all households – anyone who was present could not avoid noticing them – held the accumulated surpluses for a given household, and sometimes perhaps even that of the lineage. Moreover, these likely doubled as display items, since the number of CRJs a given family had filled would showcase their success and prosperity.¹²

But transferring this CRJ usage and its symbolism to Israel's new system of towns and cities would have been problematic for two reasons. First, although lineages certainly continued to have relevance in towns, town life, with its variegated economic structure, favored smaller economic units. The increase in hired labor, for example, would have enabled dissatisfied people to leave the extended family and lineage, tempting them to start a life on their own. Some opted for administrative positions and commerce, but most probably drifted to the fringes of society. This, in turn, led to an increase in the importance of the nuclear families at the expense of the larger ones, as well as to a much larger socioeconomic inequality. And even within the lineages and the

¹¹ For the CRJ, see Esse 1992; Faust 2006a; for Israelite society in the Iron II, see Reviv 1993; Dever 2012; Faust 2012.

¹² The CRJs, in much smaller numbers, were found also in non-Israelite settlements (e.g., in one neighborhood in Megiddo and in one in Tel Qasile) and they probably indicate some connections between the inhabitants there and the Israelites (Faust 2006a; forthcoming b).

extended families, not everyone necessarily worked together in the field, leading to further differentiation and potential fragmentation.

Second, lineages and clans are large and powerful organizations that command loyalty, wield power, and accumulate surpluses. Political leaders tend not to look favorably on competing structures. To put it another way, the power and significance of clans and clan identity are, in most cases, inversely proportional to those of the state. Accordingly, once political leadership arose, it would naturally try to weaken these units, as they can challenge and even endanger the authority of the leader.

Thus, the disappearance of the CRJ in the Iron IIA Cisjordan likely reflects the decline of the clans that would have been buoyed by both the natural process that accompanied the move to the towns, as well as by the active efforts of the emerging monarchy (that itself also evolved, partly as a result of the movement of population into the central sites).¹³

4. Red Slip and Burnish. The key to understanding the social function of slip and burnish in Iron IIA society lies in perceiving which vessels were treated this way and which were not. As noted, the vessels treated with slip and burnished were almost exclusively bowls and juglets as well as small kraters (and, very rarely, small storage vessels) – that is, those used in the consumption of food and beverages. Storage jars and cooking pots were left untreated.¹⁴

Partly this could be because serving vessels are “public” whereas cooking pots are “private.” Nevertheless, treating the public versus private nature of a vessel’s use as a key factor in deciding whether to beautify it is neither inevitable nor universal since burnished, slipped, or even decorated cooking pots and pithoi do appear in other cultures. Thus, even if there is a tendency to upgrade serving vessels more than cooking or storage items, the decision of which item to treat or decorate is specific to each culture and period – it depends on the message the treated pottery was supposed to convey, and its intended audience.

¹³ One telling piece of evidence that supports this contention is the persistence of the CRJs (even if in a different form) in parts of Transjordan (e.g., Herr 2001), since the processes of social complexity were slower and weaker there.

¹⁴ See Faust 2002 for detailed discussion and references.

The key to deciphering the message and identifying the audience in this specific case rests with the division between food consumption and food preparation and storage; pottery vessels used for the former were treated and changed, while those used for the latter were left untreated.

Cross-cultural studies show that, as a general rule, domestic food preparation is associated with women.¹⁵ At the very least, the available evidence from the ancient Near East supports this division.

Various lines of evidence suggest that in ancient Israel too, domestic chores, including baking bread, making clothing, lighting candles, and rearing young children, were seen as feminine. See, for example, the poetic description of the “woman of valor” in Proverbs 31, which lists the many household chores a perfect wife can master.¹⁶ In contrast, entertaining guests was clearly viewed as a male activity.

One classic instantiation of the distinction between female food preparation and male food consumption is the account in Genesis 18, in which Abraham invites three angels whom he thinks are men to have a meal with him. Abraham prepares the meat, an act associated with hunting and masculinity (men are responsible for preparing meat on fire in most cultures), but he runs into the tent to tell Sarah to bake bread for the meal. Moreover, Sarah does not join the men for the actual meal but remains in the tent. In other words, even though she prepares the food, the act of hosting is viewed as male.

For our purposes, the historicity or lack of historicity behind the various biblical accounts does not matter and we would probably all agree that a meal with angels is not likely to have been a real occurrence. Nevertheless, the importance of such narratives lies in the principle of unconscious revelation. The fact that the storyteller would assume that, for such a meal, the wife would bake the bread and the husband would feast with the guests reveals a great deal about the author’s perceptions about gender roles.

Even if such hosting was seldom a daily activity in most households, the distinction between food and beverage serving vessels and cooking

¹⁵ For example, Murdock 1937; Murdock and Provost 1973.

¹⁶ Also 1 Samuel 8:13 and Leviticus 26:26.

and storage vessels likely reflects the male/female dichotomy common to ancient Israel as well as to other ancient Near Eastern societies.

This fits with another common dichotomy between the social roles of males and females, prevalent in complex societies – the distinction between public and private. In many societies, and this is certainly true of the Israelite society as presented in the Bible, a major social division between genders was along the axis of public and private space. The men were the public faces of the lineage, acting as judges, officials, warriors, and priests. Women, in contrast, were dominant in the private sphere, running the households. This too is exemplified in Proverbs 31. We have noted that the woman is responsible for the domestic sphere, but another verse indicates that her husband “is well known at the gates of the city, where he sits with the elders” (v. 23).

Thus, even within the household, women prepared the food in the private sphere, whereas men entertained guests in the public sphere. Feasting and food service is in this public male sphere, and the pottery treated with slip and burnish was meant to express the nature of this activity, differentiating it from mundane daily activities. But how is this related to the main issue addressed here?

While some basic gendered division does exist in all societies, one element of many hierarchical societies is that the differences between the roles of men and women are imbued with additional meanings, and there is a hierarchy of significance between what men are doing (more important) and what women are doing (less important). Moreover, the association of public with male and private with female is stronger in more complex societies. Thus, it appears that the application of slip and burnish to vessels used in what was perceived as male activity is simply a manifestation of this emergent hierarchy.¹⁷

Appreciating that this hierarchy is not universal is the key to understanding the significance of the relatively sudden mass appearance of slip and burnish on vessels that were viewed as participating in male activities. Gendered division of labor was prevalent before, but as society became complex, male activity was viewed as more important, and subsequently the vessels associated with it were treated differently. The appearance of

¹⁷ Faust 2002. Compare Reiter 1975: 273; Rohrlich 1980.

slip and burnish therefore reflects the significant increase in social complexity, and consequently, in general hierarchy at the time, which resulted in vessels used for male activity receiving a special treatment.¹⁸

5. The disappearance of Aegean-inspired Philistine pottery. This phenomenon, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, is also related to the development of the highland kingdom at the time discussed here, and to the change in the Philistine boundary maintenance strategy that partly resulted from it (even if the source of inspiration for the new style of pottery adopted in Philistia was Phoenician). The issue will be discussed later, and here we would just like to note that this drastic change can also easily be explained as resulting, even if indirectly, from the emergence of the highland polity.

6. The Negbite Pottery. The mass appearance of the simple, hand-made pottery in the Negev Highlands at exactly the same time when all the other changes were taking place is also no coincidence. While this form will receive a detailed treatment in Chapter 9, we will just note here that its appearance was also related to the emerging polity in the north, and the changes it inflicted on the local population in the south, whose inhabitants may have been transferred to this region by coercion. The adoption of the Negbite Ware was a result of these changes, and hence it is an expression of or a reaction to the social complexity brought about by the emergence of the highland polity.

SUMMARY

The drastic ceramic changes discussed in this chapter in some detail, as well as those mentioned here only briefly, reflect significant social changes that took place during the transition from the Iron I to the Iron II. While more than one explanation could probably be raised for each change in isolation, the development of the highland polity in the region during this period, with all the subsequent hierarchical structures and increased social complexity, serves as one overarching explanation that can account for all of the changes, separately and together.

¹⁸ Naturally, women used these vessels, but they were associated with male activity.

CHAPTER 6

Resettling the Shephelah

THE RIDDLE: THE SHEPHELAH (JUDEAN LOWLANDS) was only sparsely inhabited in the Iron I, and yet in the Iron IIA, the area became packed with towns. Why did the demographics shift so drastically in this period?

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE SHEPHELAH: AN OVERVIEW

In the Iron I, the highlands were dotted with villages and the entire ridge, from northern Samaria to the southern tip of the Hebron hill country, experienced a population surge. Settlement was denser as one moved northward, but even Judah in the south was settled, even if more sparsely. In contrast, the region bordering the Judean highlands to the west, called the Shephelah in Hebrew (i.e., “lowlands”), was hardly settled at all.¹

IRON I: A SPARSELY SETTLED FRONTIER. Only a handful of Iron I villages have been discovered so far, almost all located on the Shephelah’s eastern side, in or near the trough valley that separates the highlands from the lowlands. In the north of this valley was Beth Shemesh and slightly southwest of it was Yarmuth. In the south were Tel ‘Eton, Tel Beit Mirsim, and Tel Halif. On the western side, somewhat isolated, was the small site of Khirbet er-Rai (Figure 11).

Culturally speaking, the villages of the eastern Shephelah were not part of the emerging highland settlement system but were typical Canaanite

¹ This chapter is largely based on Faust 2013, 2014, 2020, with some updates and additions, and most of the basic bibliography can be found there.



Figure 11 Map of the Shephelah and southern coastal plain settlements (based on LISROP map; see Faust and Shweka 2023; 2024).

villages, which continued earlier Late Bronze Age settlements that existed on the same mounds (see box “The Canaanite Enclave of the Eastern Shephelah [Trough Valley]”).

This continuity, however, was exceptional as most of the Late Bronze Age cities in the Shephelah, such as Lachish and Azekah, ceased to exist and were uninhabited in the Iron I. Furthermore, even the trough valley sites were destroyed during the transition to the Iron I and were apparently smaller than the Late Bronze Age towns on which they were now built.

Geopolitically, the Shephelah was situated between the Israelite highlands on its east and the Philistine city-states on its west. The latter were the dominant powers in the region and were the precipitant cause of the change in the highland's settlement patterns from small villages to central, fortified towns, and of the emergence of the highland polity (Chapter 4). Moreover, the Philistine city-states of Gath and Ekron sat adjacent to the Shephelah and likely dominated the area. Thus, many scholars understand the Philistines to have been responsible for the Shephelah's relative emptiness in this period.²

Nevertheless, the villages in the Shephelah seem to have formed a Canaanite enclave and maintained an independent or neutral stance without joining either the Philistines or the Israelites. In any event, neither the Philistines nor the Israelites attempted to settle the region in the Iron I, leaving it mostly as a no-man's-land for both, and thus as a remaining pocket of Canaanite culture.³

**Box: The Canaanite Enclave of the Eastern Shephelah
(Trough Valley)**

Why do we define the inhabitants of the small string of Iron I settlements in the eastern Shephelah as Canaanites? In Chapters 4 and 5, we discussed some of the distinct differences between Israelites and Philistines, and only briefly commented on some Canaanite practices. The word "Canaanites" is often used as a general term for indigenous groups who did not adopt an Israelite or Philistine identity, and (like

² For example, Bunimovitz 1998; Shavit 2008.

³ Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011; Faust and Katz 2011, and subsequently many others.

Box: (cont.)

the terms “Israelite” and “Philistine”) incorporates within it many subgroups with clear differences between them.

Like their Israelite and Philistine neighbors, Canaanites also made use of material cultural markers to demarcate the differences between themselves and their neighbors, and to maintain their ethnic boundaries. Still, given the different contexts, the exact strategy of boundary maintenance and the way traits were manipulated differed somewhat between the various Canaanite groups.

The trough valley Canaanites, for example, situated between the highland Israelites and the coastal Philistines, defined themselves in contrast to both groups. They therefore avoided items associated with the Israelites, such as the collared rim jars, as well as Philistine traits such as using Aegean-inspired Monochrome pottery or consuming pork.⁴ The end result was a string of villages whose material culture revealed sharp boundaries in some traits, distinguishing them from their neighbors.⁵

IRON II: A BUSY SETTLEMENT HUB. The situation was drastically altered during the Iron IIA. Over the course of the tenth–ninth centuries BCE, many settlements were erected in the Shephelah in sites that were uninhabited during the Iron I, including the short-lived settlement of Kh. Qeiyafa and many long-lasting sites such as Lachish, Tel Zayit, Tel Burna, and Azekah. Additionally, four of the five Iron I Canaanite villages in the trough valley – Beth-Shemesh, Tel ‘Eton, Tel Beth-Mirsim, and Tel Halif – went through major transformations while the site at Tel Yarmuth, as well as Khirbet er-Rai further west, were abandoned at some point in Iron IIA’s early phase. Let’s elaborate on these processes, beginning with the establishment of new sites in the Shephelah.⁶

⁴ Later, a limited amount of Bichrome pottery was used in these settlements, most likely as a status symbol by the local elite.

⁵ We will elaborate on the meaning of sharp boundaries in Chapter 7, and on the Canaanites at large in Chapter 15.

⁶ See, in addition to the aforementioned references, Tappy 2008; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018; Kang, Chang, and Garfinkel 2023.

The “first” site to be established – at least of those excavated so far – is that of Khirbet Qeiyafa. This short-lived site was destroyed already in the early phase of the Iron IIA, before the other new sites were established. Khirbet Qeiyafa is therefore not part of the same phenomenon, and this unique settlement will be discussed at some length at the end of this chapter.

The first (known) sustained settlement established in the Shephelah was probably Tel Zayit, at around the middle of the tenth century or slightly later. The site is best known for its abecedary, found imbedded in the wall of a building that dates from this period. According to its excavator, Ron Tappy, the site is oriented “toward the cultural core of the highlands to the east” – that is, it was connected culturally to the emerging highland polity.⁷ The founding of Tel Zayit was accompanied, perhaps slightly later, in the second half of the tenth century, by the rebuilding (Stratum V) of the city of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), destined to be the largest Judahite city in the Shephelah. In the ninth century, we see a continuation of the resettlement with the establishment of Tel Goded, Tel Harasim, Tel Burna, Tel Erani, Azekah, and Khirbet el-Qom, as well as Tel Nagila on the inner coastal plain.

That the settlers in these sites were Israelite is clear from their material culture, as noted by the excavators of these sites, as well as from the demographic reality: There is simply no way that the five or so small Canaanite villages could have produced enough people to settle all these towns let alone grow them into cities.

Moreover, they were clearly not Philistine. Not only is the material culture strikingly different from that of Philistia, showing that the settlers were not part of this world, but as we will see in Chapter 7, Philistia declined in power at the time, and withdrew to its own confines. Finally, we know from the following centuries that these towns were all culturally and politically part of Judah, and that connection likely began in this period. The culmination of this resettlement was in the eighth century when all the sites were large and urban.

The Canaanite villages in the trough valley also underwent a transformation at this time.⁸ The first to have experienced drastic change

⁷ Tappy 2008: 30.

⁸ Albright 1943; Cole 2015; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016; Faust and Sapir 2018.

seems to have been Tel' Eton, which in the first half of the tenth century transformed from a village to a fortified town. A large four-room (or longitudinal four-space [LFS]) house, likely a governor's mansion, was built at the top of the mound.

Beth Shemesh followed Tel' Eton in the mid tenth century or slightly later, and the Iron I village was turned into a fortified town with impressive public buildings. At Tel Halif, the excavators dated the "deliberate change in the use" of the area they exposed on the mound's summit to "early in the 10th century B.C.E., roughly coinciding with the establishment of the Davidic kingdom."⁹ Similar changes took place also in Tel Beit Mirsim, though the exact time is harder to tell (it was excavated a century ago, with very limited dating tools available). Tel Yarmuth is exceptional here, as it was abandoned during this period.

What led to the transformation of the Canaanite villages into fortified towns? The excavators of all four sites connected the changes to the incorporation of the sites within the highland kingdom, and this seems to be substantiated by various archaeological finds. Naturally, the changes did not just happen, coincidentally, at the time when the highland polity was beginning to develop. But it is not only the temporal association that directs us toward the highlands; the finds are also instrumental in pointing us to this direction.

For example, all three sites exhibit LFS houses during the Iron II. These houses were not only dominant in all Israelite sites, but as we shall see in Excursus 6.1, actually became an important Israelite marker during this very period.

A particularly telling example is the governor's residence at Tel' Eton, built in the first half of the tenth century BCE (Figure 12). Although the Iron I Canaanite village that existed at the site was apparently not destroyed, a large area in the uppermost part of the mound was leveled and the new, large, and impressive residence was built in the LFS style.

The discovery of a Canaanite-style foundation deposit (a chalice buried in the building's foundations) underneath the house shows that the construction was performed by local Canaanites. Thus the erection of the new residence in the LFS style but with Canaanite features is a clear

⁹ Cole 2015: 19.



Figure 12 A composite aerial photo of the governor's residence at Tel 'Eton, with an inset of the foundation deposit (the aerial images were taken by Skyview; the foundation deposit was photographed by Avraham Faust).

marker of the political incorporation of Tel 'Eton within the Israelite system. The fact that no destruction layers from this period were unearthed at the trough valley sites demonstrates that the towns joined the Israelites of their own accord.

HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

How do these changes in the Shephelah fit with what we know about the political realities in the region at the time? By the early tenth century, following the abandonment of the villages in the highlands and the concentration of population in larger settlements (as discussed in Chapter 4), a polity began to develop in this region. This polity was created to a large extent as a response to the pressure from a powerful Philistia. But, as we will

discuss in Chapter 7, a few decades later, toward the middle of the century, Philistia was significantly weakened.

Two of the mega-sites in Philistia, Ashkelon and Ekron, declined and were reduced in size, and probably significantly so – Gath is the only megacity not to have declined in size. And almost all the mid-sized and small sites in Philistia, regardless of the ethnic identity of the inhabitants, were abandoned altogether during the tenth century (e.g., Tel Zippor, Qubur al-Walayda, the *haserim*, and many others). In tandem with this, some of the mid-sized sites that survived the turmoil changed their character, and, according to the excavators, were now ruled by the highland polity.

Once we take into account the relative power of – or the seesaw relations between – the Philistines and the Highlanders in the Iron I and Iron II, we are able to make sense of the sudden change in the Shephelah from a sparsely populated Canaanite enclave to a densely populated Israelite/Judahite territory. We suggest the following reconstruction.

In the Iron I, the Philistines were a dominant, urban power, and the highland settlers were a group of small farmers scattered in many villages. From the twelfth century to the eleventh century, the Philistines' power increased, and they began to raid the highlands, especially in Judea and southern Samaria, which eventually brought about the Israelite abandonment of villages in exchange for central settlements.

Regardless of the identity of those who destroyed the Canaanite cities in the Shephelah during the end of the Late Bronze Age or the beginning of the Iron Age, the Philistine hegemony appears to be the cause for the continued (relative) emptiness of the Shephelah, and the Philistines prevented its resettlement during the Iron I. The inhabitants of the small Canaanite enclave in the eastern Shephelah did not affiliate themselves with either the Israelites or the Philistines, and although they were probably politically dominated by the Philistines, they maintained a separate identity throughout the Iron I.

This changed toward the beginning of the Iron II, when two simultaneous and likely related shifts occurred. First, whereas the move to central, fortified sites in the highlands began as a defensive measure in the late Iron I, this type of organization brought economic and military power along with it. Thus the developing highland polity became a serious force to be reckoned with.

Second, the huge reverse the Philistines sustained changed the way they related to the neighboring polities. This will be described in detail in Chapter 7, but suffice it to say, they changed their political strategy and did not attempt to dominate the region anymore. Instead, they were drawn into the growing lucrative trading system of the Phoenicians. It does not matter for our purposes whether the Philistine decline was caused by Israelite expansion, expressed by the Israelite takeover of the Shephelah, or whether the decline happened for some other reason, and it enabled the highland polity to settle and dominate the Shephelah. The end result was the same.

These changes did not happen in a day, of course, and it seems that at an early point during this process, the Canaanite villages of the Shephelah joined hands with the highland polity. Perhaps they saw where the wind was blowing and chose a side (more likely), and perhaps their choosing to collaborate with the highland polity tipped the scale and led to the latter having the upper hand (less likely).

One way or the other, once the Canaanite villages collaborated with the highland polity and joined it, the way to the Shephelah was opened for Israelites. In tandem with the transformation of the Canaanite villages into centers connected with the highland polity, new settlements were established in the region, all in connection with the highland population. Thus, in the course of the Iron IIA, the Shephelah changed its appearance, and once a frontier zone sparsely settled by a few Canaanite villages under Philistine hegemony, the region became an Israelite settlement hub.

TESTING THE WATERS TOO EARLY: EXPLAINING KHIRBET QEIYafa

This reconstruction of Israelite settlement in the Shephelah can also help make sense of the enigmatic town discovered in Khirbet Qeiyafa.¹⁰ At the very beginning of the Iron IIA – perhaps better defined as the transitional period from the Iron I to the Iron II – a new settlement was established six kilometers south of Beth Shemesh on a small hill overlooking the Ella Valley, an important pass from the Shephelah to the highlands between

¹⁰ For example, Garfinkel, Kreimerman, and Zilberg 2016; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018.

Jerusalem and Hebron. The ancient name of the site is unknown, though archaeologists and Bible scholars have put forward many suggestions, and we will address it briefly in Chapter 15.¹¹

The site, excavated by Yosef Garfinkel of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem together with Saar Ganor of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Michael Hasel of Southern Adventist University, is unique in many ways. First, it was constructed in the Shephelah in a period in which this area was mostly uninhabited. Second, unlike the villages that dotted the highlands, this site was fortified. It had a casemate wall running along its perimeter, and two gates – an unusual feature – one facing the west and one overlooking the valley to its southeast.

This was not a settlement that developed gradually around a few peasant households. This was a planned settlement whose wall, houses, and gates were all constructed at one time as a block. Most of the built area was devoted to dwellings, some at least built as long houses similar to proto-LFS houses. In addition, some cultic spaces were identified, and the finds included cultic objects, as well as several inscriptions, in which a few names like Ish-baal were mentioned (see Chapter 15).

The site was built during the period in which the Shephelah was empty other than the six Canaanite villages described earlier. As the Philistines dominated the region in this period, they could have built a town here, and Nadav Na'aman – a leading biblical historian from Tel Aviv University – briefly suggested just that. Nevertheless, he soon withdrew this suggestion, and for good reason: Qeiyafa is certainly not Philistine.¹² This is clear from practically every aspect of material culture, including settlement planning and architecture, and the lack of pig bones. It is further clear from an inscription found at the site that, though not fully deciphered, is written in paleo-Hebrew, while the Philistines in this period wrote in Cypro-Minoan script (still undeciphered, but it looks different than proto-Hebrew). The evidence is so overwhelming that nobody today thinks the site is Philistine.

Still, most of these factors could work for either Israelite or Canaanite settlers and, following the identification of the Iron I Canaanite enclave in the Shephelah, many who did not want to attribute the site to the Israelites

¹¹ Much of this section is based on Faust 2020.

¹² Na'aman 2008; for the withdrawal, see Na'aman 2010 [2012].

identified it as a new Canaanite fortified settlement.¹³ This, however, is unlikely. First, it is doubtful whether the small Canaanite villages had the ability to erect such a fortified settlement. Moreover, doing so would have been pointless from their perspective. Two kilometers north of Qeiyafa, on top of a high, well-defended, and dominating hill, was situated the Canaanite village of Tel Yarmuth. Should the Canaanite inhabitants have wanted, they could have built it up and fortify it, especially since (as we shall presently see) this site was far more strategically located than Kh. Qeiyafa.

Clearly, neither Philistines nor Canaanites erected the new settlement, and it is likely that Israelites were responsible for it. That the settlement was surrounded by a ring of houses built up against the inside of the wall, incorporating the casemates as rooms, strengthens the Israelite association since this became a standard feature of Israelite/Judahite city planning. Moreover, the houses were built in rectangular form, with a broad room in the back, and the entrance on the opposite side, which reflects a loose form of the so-called LFS house before it was crystallized (see Excursus 6.1). All of this suggests that the fortified settlement was built by the highland polity, which was only in its infancy during this period.

That this was Israelite construction at a time when the Philistines were still the major force in the region – before their decline later in the tenth century – helps explain the choice of location. We already noted that the site overlooks an important pass from the Shephelah into the highlands, which would have been one of the main roads from the highlands to the Philistine area. As the Philistines were the chief threat against the highland settlers, and the impetus for their abandoning their villages, moving into fortified towns, and forming a central leadership, it is easily understandable that the new polity would attempt to guard the important pass into their territory. And yet this is not the whole picture.

Although Qeiyafa is perched upon a small hill overlooking the road, there are many nearby hills that are higher and much more strategically located (Figure 13; see also Figure 30). We have mentioned Tel Yarmuth, but even the small hill to the west of Qeiyafa guards the junction better

¹³ For example, Na'aman 2010 [2012], 2017; Koch 2012; This is typical of the Tel Aviv school, although, interestingly, Finkelstein acknowledged that the site was Israelite (e.g., Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2017). The issue will be discussed in Chapter 15.

than Qeiyafa, and this is clearly true of the much higher hill of Azekah, located two kilometers to the west. If anyone was interested in settling the area, or guarding the pass, or both, Azekah and Yarmuth had much greater strategic importance. Yarmuth was, as we have seen, occupied at the time by a small Canaanite village, and while this might explain why it was not chosen for the fortified settlement, the strategic hill of Azekah was not settled at the time and could have been easily built on. How can we make sense of the choice of Qeiyafa over Azekah?

What appears at first sight as a major disadvantage of Qeiyafa – its low visibility and consequent lack of domination over large areas – was actually one of the site's major strengths, when we keep in mind the relative power of Israel and the Philistines in the early tenth century. The Elah Valley, where Qeiyafa and Azekah are located, is in the vicinity of the enormous and powerful Philistine city-state of Gath. In fact, from Azekah, one can see directly into Gath and vice versa. Qeiyafa, however, is lower down, and Azekah blocks the sightline between it and Gath.

We would argue that this lack of sightline is not coincidental. As noted, the Shephelah was mostly empty, with only a handful of Canaanite villages. Qeiyafa was built by the emerging highland polity perhaps to dominate the pass, but perhaps also to test the waters for moving west and entering the Shephelah. Whatever the cause, it was an encroachment on what the

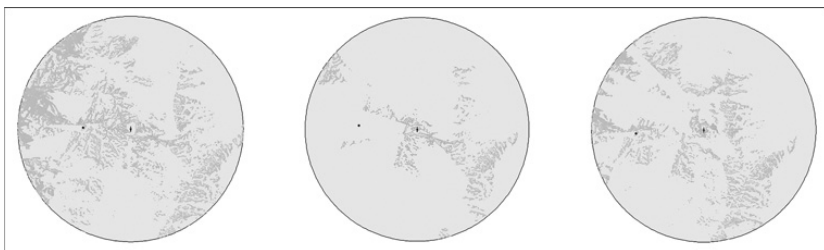


Figure 13 Comparative viewshed analysis (20 km radius; 4 m observation height) from the highest points on Tel 'Azeka (left), Kh. Qeiyafa (center), and Tel Yarmouth (right) (the observation point is marked by a small figure). The analysis demonstrates that Tel 'Azeka and Tel Yarmouth were strategically positioned, whereas Kh. Qeiyafa was not. Note that Gath (marked as a small dot) is visible from Tel 'Azeka and Tel Yarmouth, but not from Kh. Qeiyafa (prepared using the LISROP platform on a white background, and see Faust and Shweka 2023; 2024).

Philistines would have regarded as their territory or at best a neutral zone forbidden to both sides.

As the Philistines were still very powerful at the time, instead of building on the highest spot in the area, Azekah, the Israelites built lower down behind Azekah. In other words, they were trying to move west without actually “poking the Philistines in the eye” by putting it in a spot visible from the latter’s territory (we elaborate on this in Chapter 15).

Khirbet Qeiyafa might therefore have been an experiment of sorts, and one that soon failed. The site was maintained only for a short while and soon destroyed, probably because its powerful Philistine neighbor, Gath, had no further tolerance for it. This failure was because the experiment came too early, at a time when the highland polity was only beginning to flex its muscles and the Philistine city-states were still extremely powerful. Later, as the Iron IIA unfolded, the power balance shifted in the other direction, and most Canaanite villages joined the highland polity, and Israelites colonized the Shephelah.

EXCURSUS 6.1 THE ARCHITECTURE OF POWER AND THE LONGITUDINAL FOUR-SPACE HOUSE

The “four-room house,” or the “longitudinal four-space (LFS) house” as we prefer to call it, is a generic term referring to a new type of dwelling that became extremely popular and dominant during the Iron Age, mostly the Iron Age II.¹⁴ The ideal type of this structure is a long house with four main spaces or areas: a broad space at the back, and three long spaces stemming forward from it, sometimes separated by a combination of stone pillars and walls. (This is why many scholars use the term “pillared house” or “pillared courtyard house,” though we prefer not to use this term, as not all LFS houses have pillars.)¹⁵ The entrance was usually located in the central (long) room (Figure 14).

We should note from the start that the terminology is slightly misleading. First, many of the main areas/spaces/rooms were further subdivided, resulting in a much larger number of rooms than the initial schematic division. This means that even in the ideal configuration (four-space house), we have houses with seven or eight rooms. Talking about a “four-room house” with seven rooms was confusing, and led to some serious scholarly errors (see later in this excursus), and we therefore prefer to talk about the “longitudinal four-space house.” The number of basic spaces is not influenced by their subdivision into rooms.

An additional issue that needs acknowledging is that not all such houses precisely follow this ideal plan, and in the Iron Age II – the height of this type’s popularity – there was some variation, mainly in the number of long spaces: ideally, the number of long spaces/rooms was three, but often houses were built with only two (as in most urban houses), and sometimes, though rarely, four. The term “longitudinal four-space house” therefore refers to what was apparently viewed as the ideal type of this style of house.

¹⁴ For example, Shiloh 1970, 1973; Netzer 1992; Holladay 1997. The present chapter relies on these, especially on Faust and Bunimovitz 2003, 2014; Faust 2021b: 38–41, and references.

¹⁵ Moreover, other types of houses sometimes have pillars. This makes terms such as “pillared house” misleading.

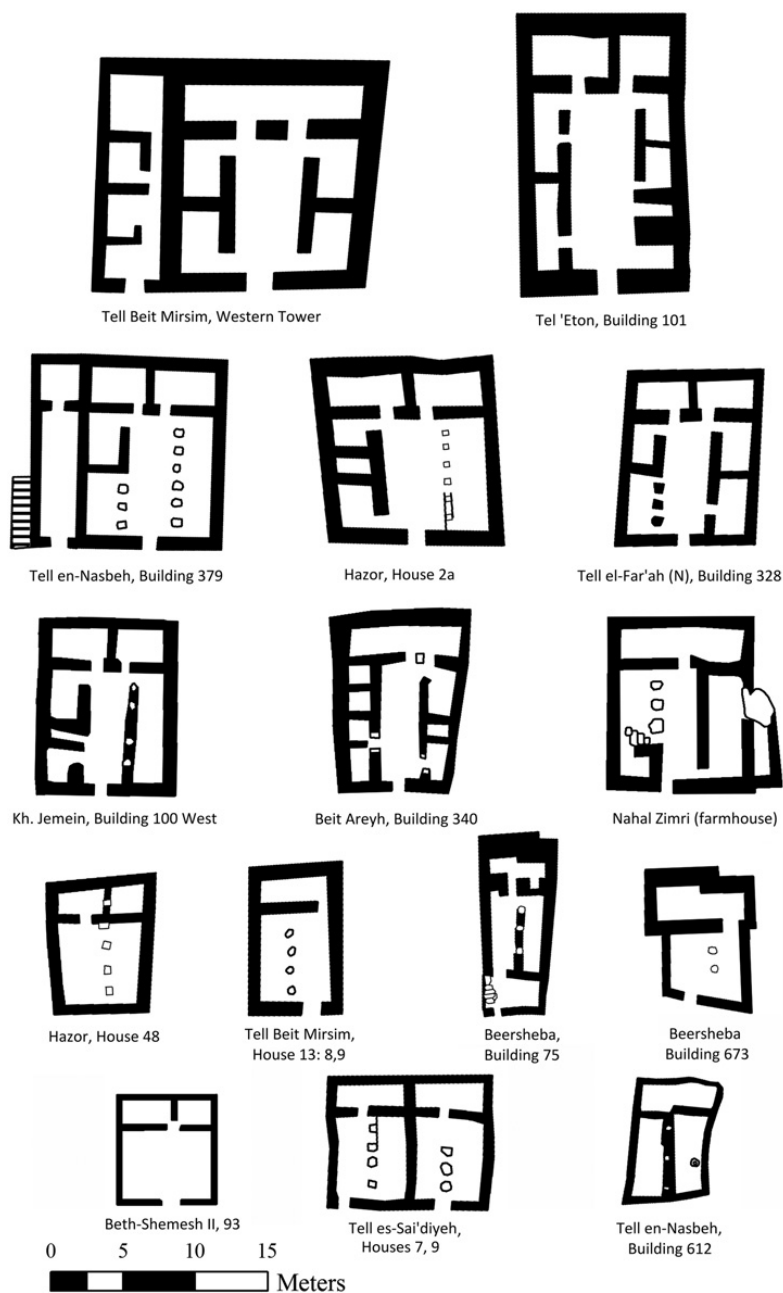


Figure 14 Plate of LFS houses.

Despite this variation, the basic plan is quite rigid and easy to identify. In no other period in the history of the region do we have a complex house plan that is even remotely as rigid as that of the LFS house.

Prototypes of this house can be seen as early as the late thirteenth–twelfth centuries BCE in some villages in the highlands, but as we will see, the ideal plan of the LFS house crystallized only during the tenth century. From this time until the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, LFS houses, built in the more rigid planning described earlier, are the most prevalent type of house there.

AN ISRAELITE HOUSE

The dominance of the LFS house in Israelite settlements has led scholars to attribute this style to the Israelites. While some have criticized this view, it remains the most prevalent in scholarship for good reason: These houses dominated the built landscape of Iron II Israelite settlements, where almost all houses – rich and poor, large and small, urban and rural – were built in this manner. At the same time, they were very rare outside Israelite settlements.

Hence the house's distribution in time and space, and the extremely dominant position it had in Israelite settlements, strongly imply that it was associated with the Israelites, and that the house must have had some social and/or ideological meaning for them, and for them only. This is further supported by the disappearance of this house form in Israel after the Assyrian conquest (722 BCE), and then in Judah after the Babylonian conquest (586 BCE), when the respective societies collapsed. It is clear, therefore, that Israelites lived in these houses, and it is therefore justified to call them Israelite houses. This does not mean that non-Israelites could not use such houses, but the evidence suggests that this was, at best, rare.

AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION?

A few scholars, some of whom were wary of the ethnic association of the house, have endeavored to explain the popularity of the house type by its superb functional qualities. Such studies attempted to show how the different rooms could have served for storage,

sleeping, cooking, and so forth.¹⁶ Still, attempts to identify clear patterns in the use of specific rooms (e.g., the broad rooms) have been unsuccessful, and the finds within the various houses show that despite the rigid planning, the various spaces were not used uniformly.

Clearly, functionality does not explain the house's popularity and distribution. Moreover, why did other groups, living in the same regions and facing the same ecological conditions and hardships, not adopt the house? After all, the Canaanites at Tel Rehov, for example, had the same needs as their Israelite neighbors, but no such houses were found there. Furthermore, why did the house disappear when Israel and Judah were destroyed? No changes in peasant life and no architectural or agricultural inventions took place at these times, making it clear that the house's demise was connected with the collapse of these societies. Finally, the plan of the house also served for public structures, and – in the late Iron Age – even for burial caves. This also does not work with the functional explanation. Thus, it seems clear that during the Iron II, after the LFS plan was formalized, the Israelites used it for more than purely functional reasons.

Box: LFS Houses in Non-Israelite Settlements?

The main reason some scholars have provided for their dissatisfaction with the Israelite label for the LFS house is that such houses have ostensibly been found in non-Israelite sites such as Tel Qasile, Afula, Tel Qiri, and Tel Keisan, as well as in various Transjordanian sites such as Sahab and Tall al-Umayri.¹⁷ Finkelstein has summarized the critique, noting that such

¹⁶ For example, Stager 1985; Holladay 1992, 1997. These studies usually did not study the actual finds unearthed in the different buildings, and simply showed that there were sufficient rooms to serve such functions as known to have existed in ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological studies. Also, these studies did not actually point to a specific function that could have been carried out only in the LFS house, and not in other houses (like courtyard houses) and hence did not really explain the house.

¹⁷ Ahlström 1993: 339; Finkelstein 1996a: 204–205; also Faust 2006a: 71–84, 221–226, 2012: 217–219, and references.

Box: (cont.)

houses have “been found also in the lowland and Transjordanian Iron I sites,” and concluding: “Its popularity in the central hill country must be linked to environmental and social factors, rather than to the ethnic background of the communities.”¹⁸

This skeptical approach, however, is unwarranted. Putting aside the problems with suggesting environmental and social factors detailed previously, an examination of the remains of these so-called exceptions shows that most of them are simply not LFS houses.

Take, for example, the houses uncovered at Tel Keisan, Sahab, Tel Qiri, and Afula. It is true that the houses at Afula and Tel Keisan have four rooms, while those at Tel Qiri and Sahab have pillars. Nevertheless, all are arranged in a completely different configuration than the LFS plan.¹⁹

To risk stating the obvious, not every house with four rooms is a “four-room house.” Such a claim would be ridiculous as houses all over the world, from ancient times to modern, with all types of plans, are sometimes built with four rooms. Similarly, not all houses with pillars are “pillared-courtyard houses” as LFS houses are sometimes called, and, as noted, many LFS houses do not have pillars.

In fact, when we remove the misidentified houses from the list, we find that the number of “exceptions” discovered in Cisjordan – for example, at Tel Qasile – is minimal, and they date almost exclusively to the Iron I.²⁰ As for the houses in Transjordan, some – for example, at Tall al ‘Umayri – were most probably used by Israelites who lived in that region.²¹ Indeed, once we factor in the Israelite presence in

¹⁸ Finkelstein 1996a: 204–205. Finkelstein did not say what social and environmental factors made this type of house more suitable for life there than other types of houses.

¹⁹ See Dothan 1955 (Afula); Humbert 1993 (Tel Keisan); Portugali 1987 (Tel Qiri); Ibrahim 1975 (Saheb). See also Faust 2012: 217–219, and references.

²⁰ For Tel Qasile, see Mazar 2009.

²¹ For example, Herr and Clark 2001; see also Faust 2006a: 221–226, 2017; Petter 2014.

Box: (cont.)

parts of the Transjordan, the number of LFS houses in non-Israelite sites is also minimal. Here again, they date mainly to the Iron I.

The existence of a few exceptions in the Iron I, especially in Transjordan, should not come as a surprise since ethnic identity in this region was not always fixed at that time, and many groups used various traits when negotiating their identities. In contrast, during the Iron II, after the crystallization of ethnic identities in the region, and of the house type, LFS houses in non-Israelite sites are almost nonexistent, and this is the more important point that must be stressed.

AN EMBODIMENT OF ISRAELITE SOCIETY

The variation in the subtypes of the house makes sense in light of the Iron II's social composition: In both kingdoms, large LFS houses were prevalent in the Israelite villages and farmsteads but rare in urban settings, where smaller three-space houses were more abundant. In urban settings, only the elite lived in large – sometimes very large – LFS houses. These differences are most likely the result of differing family structure and wealth: Whereas large LFS houses were used by rich and large extended families, smaller, three-space houses were used by poorer urban nuclear families. Variation in the inner division of many of the larger houses was probably a result of the life cycle of the family.

In other words, the typical rural families were extended, unlike the typical urban nuclear families, and this influenced both the size of the dwellings as well as their inner division. The urban wealthy maintained the extended family structure, and hence the size of the houses. Their wealth was expressed also in the quality of construction and additional characteristics. What is important for our purposes, however, is that in Israelite society, everybody – rich and poor, urban and rural – lived in LFS houses of this or that type.

THE MEANING OF THE LFS HOUSE

The association of the house with the Israelite world can be seen in many of the house's architectural features, which mirror Israelite values and ethnic behavior. Here are just a few examples:

- **Cosmology.** The houses reflect a strong tendency to face the east, and very few houses are oriented toward the west. We attribute this to cosmological principles, which are reflected also in Classical Biblical Hebrew, as well as in a number of biblical passages.²²
- **Egalitarian Ideology.** Analyzing the LFS structures using access analysis – that is, a study of how one enters and moves through the various spaces of the house (what scholars call spatial syntax) – reveals easy and hierarchy-free access from the central courtyard to every room. Unlike other types of dwellings, in which one sometimes needs to walk through one room to get to another, there are hardly any movement restrictions in LFS houses; once in the central room or courtyard, one can go directly to the desired space. This corresponds with other lines of evidence, all suggesting that Israelite society had an egalitarian ideology.²³
- **Purity Practices.** Some of the larger and more complex houses had a room devoid of pottery.²⁴ Given the location of these rooms within the house and the finds within them, these rooms were likely used for impure individuals, mainly women during menstruation. Most societies relegated impure individuals to separate buildings, caves, or tents, but the unique practice in Israelite houses was matched by the prescription in the Priestly legislation and in other biblical sources that reveals that, in ancient Israel, such individuals stayed at home. The plan of the building, which enabled free access from the courtyard into any of the rooms, also enabled impure individuals to stay in the house as they were not forced to move through other rooms in order to reach theirs, and others did not have to cross the “impure person’s space” either. (The houses most likely influenced the development of the laws.)

²² For example, Faust 2001.

²³ For the ideology, see, for example, Gordis 1971; Gottwald 1979; Sparks 2007; Berman 2008; Shapira 2009; Knohl 2018; Faust 2006a, in press. See also Chapter 15.

²⁴ Faust and Katz 2017; Faust 2019b. For broader studies, see, for example, Galloway 1997.

Because the Israelites were preoccupied with order, once this kind of house became typical, it eventually became the appropriate and “right” one.²⁵ In the Iron II, therefore, the house was seen as suitable for the Israelite way of life and was extensively used in urban and rural settings by both the rich and poor. As noted, variations between the houses denoted social differences within society, but the fact that all members of society used this house transmitted a clear message of social belonging.

HOW AND WHEN THE “CLASSICAL” LFS PLAN WAS ADOPTED

Why was the extremely rigid plan, so common in the Iron II, adopted?²⁶ In the past, archaeologists believed that, during the early Iron I, this house style was just one of a few used in the highlands, and in the course of this era and Israel’s ethnogenesis, its loose plan was adopted and used as an ethnic marker to denote differences with the other groups. The adoption of the more rigid planning was, in this conception, the end result of a long and gradual process.

While the reconstruction of the process of Iron I boundary maintenance has stood the test of time, more recent studies show that the adoption of the classical, rigid plan was not, in fact, gradual. Rather, it took place within something like two generations at the very beginning of the Iron II.

What we call early (or proto-)LFS houses only broadly conform to what develops into the classical style. These usually are long houses, most often with a number of long spaces and a broad room at the back. While they are clearly different from the Philistine and even the Canaanite houses, they are not really uniform. With the exception of building J at Tel Qasile X, no LFS houses conforming to the classical plan can be dated to the Iron I.²⁷ None of the buildings excavated at Iron I Kh. Raddana,

²⁵ Compare Douglas 1966.

²⁶ For the process, see Faust 2021: 38–41; for the Tel ‘Eton house, see Faust and Sapir 2018; for the Negev houses, see Haiman 2012; for Feinan, see Levy et al. 2014: 204–205, 231–232; for Tel Mevorakh, see Stern 1978: 46–47; for Megiddo, see Kempinski 1989: 121, figure 40:15, 126; Lehmann and Killebrew 2010; Ussishkin 2017: 321–324.

²⁷ At best, there is one more house in this stratum that resembles the classical LFS plan.



Figure 15 The large house at Izbet Sartah. Note that the entrance is located at the edge of one of the long walls (cf. Figure 4:b), deviating from the typical LFS house plan (photographed by Avraham Faust).

‘Ai, Izbet Sartah, Giloh, Tel Masos, Tall ‘Umayri, and so forth, can be labeled as a classical LFS houses, and despite the similarities, all differ in some substantial details.

Even houses that are quite similar in design to the classical form still deviate in important ways. The main building at Izbet Sartah, for example, is often cited as a clear LFS structure, but its entrance is from one of the long walls, making it a broad building (rather than a long one, e.g., Figure 15), and access analysis reveals a deeper tree shape, rather than a short one. In other cases, the broad room is partially missing. Similar deviations can be found in practically all Iron I structures (including the aforementioned houses at Kh. Qeiyafa).

Then, in the tenth century BCE, after more than 200 years in which Israelites (mostly?) made use of the loose plan, the classical plan was crystallized quickly. From this point on, many houses are built in the formal LFS plan – that is, as long houses built in straight lines, with ninety-degree angles between walls, and with three long spaces and a broad space at the back, with the entrance at the end of the central long space.

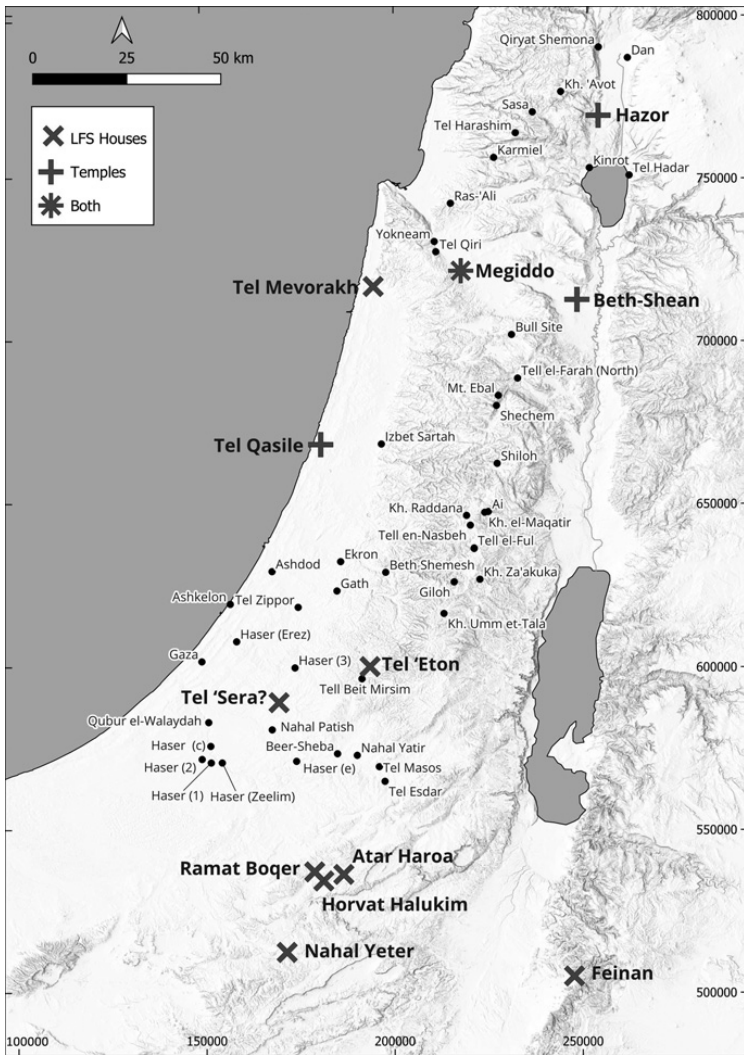


Figure 16 Map detailing some of the fingerprints of the highland's polity expansion (base map: Esri, USGS, Airbus DS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community). For the temples, see Excursus 8.1.

In addition, these “formally” designed houses are now found in a much larger area, far beyond the highlands, including the Shephelah, the Sharon Plain, the northern valleys, the Negev Highlands, and the Arava sites where they were apparently used by the highland polity. The

following are a few examples of the new classical LFS houses of the tenth century BCE:

Tel ‘Eton: A large (ca. 230 sqm) and impressive building was erected on the highest part of Tel ‘Eton, most likely serving the new Israelite governor. (Figure 12, and see discussion earlier in this chapter.)

Negev Highlands: Alongside the famous Negev “fortresses” or casemate structures, quite a few LFS houses were erected, many of which were built very nicely and most likely served Israelite functionaries. (See discussion in Chapter 9.)

Feinan: A few LFS houses were identified at Kh. en-Nahas/Feinan in the Transjordan. The largest one, also called the monumental building, probably symbolized Israelite formal domination over the region in the early tenth century BCE. (See discussion in Chapter 9.)

Tel Mevorakh: In the early Iron IIA phase at the site, located on the Sharon Plain, not far from Dor, a large, nicely built LFS house was erected, most likely serving as an Israelite governor’s residence. (See discussion in Chapter 15.)

Megiddo: Structure 1A appears to be the earliest classical LFS uncovered at Megiddo, and is dated to the first city built there in the Iron II, designated Level VA or VA-VIB. It is possible that various public buildings, such as Megiddo palace 6000 (also dated to the early Iron IIA) also follows this plan. These houses, and certainly palace 6000, symbolized Israelite control and domination (see Chapter 11).

What all of this demonstrates is that the LFS form was abruptly selected in the tenth century BCE to serve as a template for governors’ residences, and the house began to function as architecture of power and to transmit messages of domination and control by the new Israelite polity (Figure 16).

The structure’s distribution became much wider than the areas of traditional Israelite settlement, since now the highland polity used it wherever it took control of new areas. It is likely that the selection of this type of house to be used by the Israelite polity and to transmit messages of control led to its subsequent widespread adoption in all segments of Israelite society. That the LFS house functioned as a

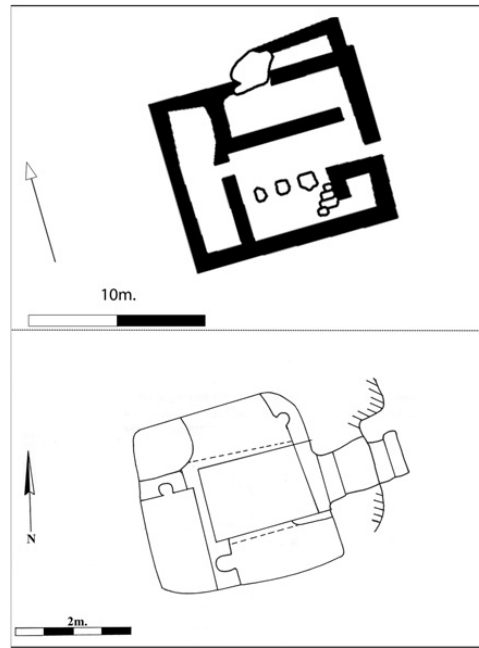


Figure 17 A comparison of an LFS house (top) and a Judahite tomb (bottom) (redrawing of an LFS house at Nahal Zimri [Yogev 1985: 30] and a Judahite tomb from Gibeon [Eshel 1987: 9]).

marker of “Israelitehood” also explains why cities and towns outside the Israelite sphere did not use this type of house in the Iron II.

This unique plan or template influenced even the typical Judahite tombs of the late Iron Age, and once Judahites began burying in caves in the eighth century BCE, they simply hewed the house in the ground (Figure 17), perhaps implying that it is the house of the dead. This explains how the house became a microcosm of the Israelite world, reflecting the Israelite perception of space and embodying Israelite society and its values.

CHAPTER 7

What Happened to Philistia in the Tenth Century?

THE RIDDLE: IN THE Iron IIA, Philistia was transformed; most of the larger Philistine megacities shrank, whereas the mid-sized and small settlements were mostly abandoned. Even the material culture in the region was dramatically altered, as expressed, for example, by the complete cessation in the production of the so-called Philistine pottery. What happened to the Philistines in this transitional period?

We have met the Philistines in practically all previous chapters, and noted their significant impact on the political and cultural landscape of the Iron Age I. In the present chapter, we would like to focus on their settlement in Philistia and the processes the region underwent during the Iron I and Iron II (for the sites, see Figure 11).¹

SETTLEMENT IN PHILISTIA IN THE IRON I

In the twelfth century, groups of people immigrated from somewhere in the Aegean world to the Near East. The peoples are popularly known as the Sea Peoples, based on the description of them in contemporary Egyptian sources such as the Medinet Habu inscription of Ramesses III. One such group, called the Philistines (briefly addressed in Excursus 3.1), settled on the southern Levantine coastal plain, and took over a number of central cities that were once Canaanite, such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron (Tel Mique),

¹ For general works on Philistines, see Dothan 1982, Yasur-Landau 2010, and the papers in Killebrew and Lehmann 2013; Fischer and Burge 2017. For detailed discussion of the changes discussed in this chapter, see Faust 2020, 2021b, and most of the basic bibliography can be found there.

and Gath (Tel Zafit/es-Safi), and built them up.² (According to the Bible, a fifth center was in the city of Gaza, but the latter is not accessible to archaeologists and we will not discuss it in this chapter.) Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath were megacities, each covering dozens of hectares. Ashdod, while smaller than the other megacities, was also relatively large, covering some eight hectares.

A few generations after the initial Philistine settlement on the Levantine coast, following the withdrawal of the Egyptian empire from the region and the decline of some of the Canaanite city-states, the Philistines became the strongest power in the Cisjordan and dominated at least its southern part.

That the Philistines' cities were massive – much larger than any other city in the entire country at the time – was likely not happenstance but policy. Several scholars have suggested that the Philistines probably forced some of the local Canaanites under their domination to abandon their villages and move into cities.³ This urban relocation policy would give the Philistines greater control over the locals and integrate them more strongly into their political and cultural sphere. Part of this Philistine policy toward the “natives” explains why, as noted in Chapter 6, the nearby Shephelah was almost entirely empty, with only a handful of small, independent Canaanite villages, mostly along the trough valley, in its easternmost part.

Still, other settlements flourished in the periphery of the Philistine centers – for example, Tell el-Hesi, Tel Zippor, Tel Mor, Tel Sera, Tel Ma'aravim, Tel Haror, and Tel Gema, plus a group of small settlements, including Qubur el-Walaydah, Nahal Patish, Umm el-Baqar, and additional sites known collectively as the Haserim. These villages and towns, though part of the Philistine political and cultural system, appear to have been inhabited by Canaanites living under Philistine dominion.

PHILISTINE MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE IRON I

The Philistine settlements in the Iron I exhibit several distinct material cultural traits.

² Other groups of Philistines also settled in the northern Levant, and see Chapter 15.

³ For example, Bunimovitz 1998; Shavit 2008; also Faust 2015b, and additional references.

AEGEAN-INSPIRED POTTERY. The best known and most striking trait is the pottery assemblage, discussed in Chapter 5. When the Philistines settled in the Levant, they brought with them an Aegean-style pottery tradition.

The earliest form of this pottery is what scholars called Philistine Monochrome, which is essentially a locally produced version of the Aegean Mycenaean IIC:1 pottery (Figure 8). It is called Monochrome because it is painted in one color – red – but the decoration itself was in the Aegean style and included geometric motifs as well as figures such as birds and fish. The most common such decorated vessels were bowls, used mainly for the consumption of beverages. The distribution of this pottery was limited in time and place: it was only produced during the first generations after their settlement and served almost solely the central Philistine cities – that is, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron – and is perhaps also found in Tel Haror.

Over time, the Monochrome evolved into the so-called Philistine Bichrome Ware, so called because the decoration was now in two colors – red and black. The Aegean motifs in decoration and pottery forms continue and seems to be the hallmark of this pottery, but it exhibits other influences as well (Figure 18).⁴ As Philistine power expanded, this form of pottery also made its way to the non-Philistine, Canaanite settlements within the Philistine sphere of influence. It also appears to have made it, though in a much lower quantities, to the Canaanite sites outside the Philistine-dominated areas – for example, in the northern valleys – partly as a natural part of trade between groups, and likely also as a status symbol for elites who used this style, reminiscent of the region's center of power, to legitimate their own control.

Bichrome hardly ever appears, however, in the highlands, even though many of these were much closer to the Philistines than the cities and towns in the north. This shows that the lack of Philistine pottery in the highland sites is not happenstance but a result of cultural politics. The Israelites avoided Philistine pottery as a statement, stressing their difference from them.

⁴ For example, Mountjoy 2010.

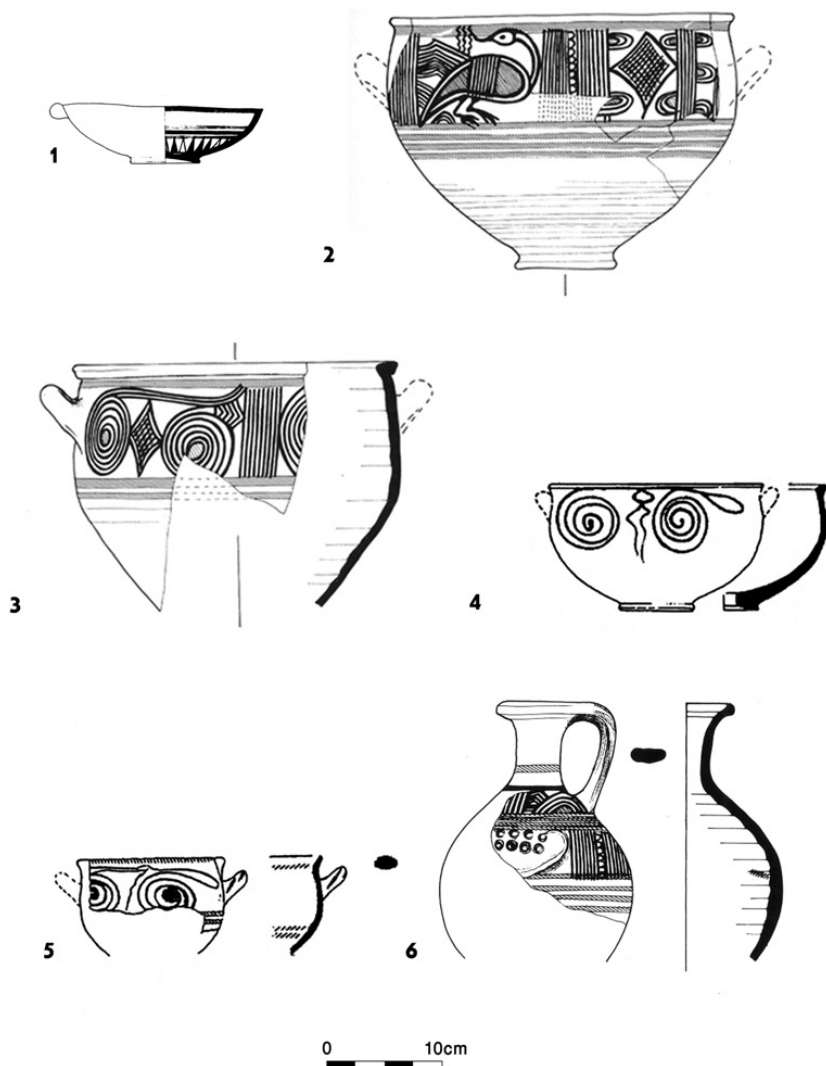


Figure 18 Sample of Philistine Bichrome pottery from Azor (vessel 1), Ashdod (vessels 2–3, 6), Tel Qasile (vessel 4), and Ekron (vessel 5) (redrawn after Dothan 1982, figs. 2:6, 54:2; Dothan and Porath 1993, figs. 27:1, 4, 32:2; Ben-Shlomo 2006, fig. 1.17:7; for more details, see also Faust 2015c, table 2).

This is also why one of the hallmarks of the highland style, the oversized, massive collared rim jars (CRJs) that probably served as symbols of plenty and affluence, are practically absent in Philistine

sites (and even in Canaanite sites in the south, for that matter). Like the highlanders, the Philistines too were unwilling to use the distinct trademark pottery style of their rivals.

This sharp division between Bichrome Ware on one side and CRJs on the other is one of the clear signs of the power struggle that took place between the Philistines and the Israelites, both of which used their pottery styles to demarcate boundaries between them. The differences went beyond the mere presence/absence of certain types: The Philistine Bichrome pottery was highly decorated, covered with a white slip and then painted and decorated in Aegean-inspired style, while the highland pottery was entirely undecorated.

The importance of the Philistine, Aegean-inspired pottery in boundary negotiation is evident not only by the presence/absence line that can be drawn between Israelites and Philistines, but also by its increased use by the Philistines during the Iron I.

Take the assemblage in Ashdod, for instance. In the early twelfth century (Stratum XIII), only 24 percent of the pottery sherds were in the Aegean-inspired style, while 73 percent were in the local Canaanite style. Later in the century (Stratum XII), the percentage of Aegean-inspired pottery jumped to 47 percent and by the eleventh century (Stratum XI), it hit 58 percent. Similar patterns of growth can be seen in Ashkelon and Ekron.

This is the opposite trend to what one might have expected, namely that a foreign group would heavily use their familiar, foreign traits upon arriving, but adopt more of the local culture as time went on. The fact that this trend moved in the opposite direction is evidence that the Philistines felt the need to define themselves as a distinct group, just as the Israelites did. In fact, the two groups were apparently defining themselves against each other.

The symbolism associated with the use of these forms can be seen by the peculiar distribution also in other sites, probably inhabited, at least partially, by indigenous, Canaanite groups. For example, in Stratum X at Tel Qasile in modern Tel Aviv, in the northern edge of Philistine domination, one excavated neighborhood in the center of the site (in the local temples and near them) exhibits many Bichrome Ware vessels, while they are practically absent in the adjacent southern neighborhood (Figure 19).

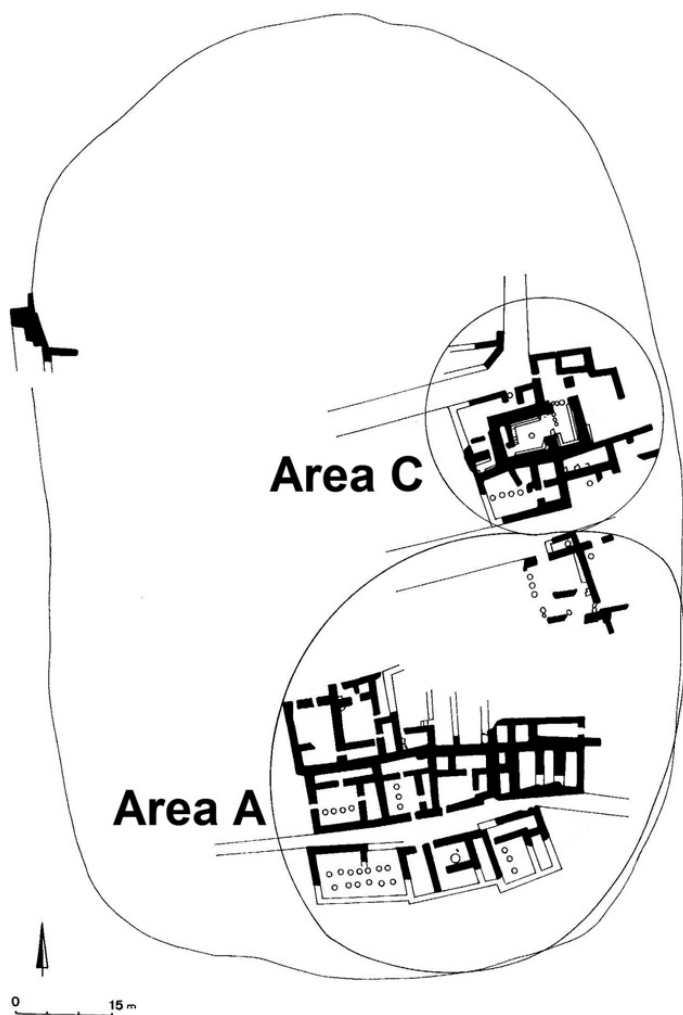


Figure 19 Tel Qasile, with schematic division between the two neighborhoods.

Interestingly, some CRJs were found in this latter neighborhood. One way to interpret this data is that the city was populated by multiple ethnic groups who lived in neighborhoods, and that the residents used the period's cultural markers to demarcate clear boundaries between themselves.

This form of boundary maintenance, in which various groups manipulated material traits to create clear boundaries between them, can be seen in other regions as well. Thus one neighborhood in Megiddo produced

many CRJs, which were very rare elsewhere at the site, and practically absent in the nearby village of Afula.

PORK CONSUMPTION. We see this same trend in yet another Philistine cultural trait: pork consumption. During most of the Iron I, the Philistines consumed a relatively large amount of pork as part of their diet, in stark contrast to the practice of their neighbors, the Canaanites and the Israelites/highlanders, who consumed little if any pork. In Ekron, for example, pig bones show up rather suddenly in the early twelfth-century strata, where the percentage jumps from close to zero in earlier strata to 14 percent in Stratum VII.

As noted in the discussion of pottery, what we would expect from an immigrating group is that cultural differences would slowly taper off. If, for instance, pork made up 14 percent of the meat diet of the Philistines at Ekron when they arrived, we might expect to see the next phase (Stratum VI) with a lower percentage of pig bones, the phase after that lower still, until eventually it would more or less hit an equilibrium with the neighbors.

In actual fact, however, the opposite occurred during the Iron I: Ekron Stratum VI (late twelfth century) shows a slight increase in pork consumption (17 percent), and Stratum V (eleventh century) shows a large increase (26 percent). This, of course, resembles the pattern in the frequency of the Aegean-inspired decorated pottery. And a similar trend can be seen in Ashkelon.

That this trend moved in this unexpected direction is evidence that the Philistines felt the need to define themselves as a distinct group and came to consider pork consumption as an important part of their identity. The inverse was true as well, nonconsumption of pork became an important identity marker for their neighbors, and all non-Philistine settlements in the south (Israelite and Canaanite alike) as well as all highland sites (including in Samaria) appear to have avoided this meat altogether.

Tellingly, in contrast to the presence of Aegean pottery in at least some percentage in the small Philistine-controlled Canaanite villages of the eleventh century, pig bones are virtually absent from these sites, suggesting (along with the absence of other Philistine traits like hearths) that the Canaanite inhabitants of these sites wished to maintain clear boundaries with the Philistines. Thus, while these Canaanites were part of

the Philistine political orbit, they demarcated themselves as non-Philistine by almost completely avoiding this meat, which the Philistines were now consuming in growing quantities.

Pottery and pork consumption are two noticeable examples of the larger pattern, and they are sufficient to illustrate Philistine strategies. The picture we get of the Philistines in the Iron I is of a strong, urban society gradually dominating a large swath of territory, especially in the south. As part of their battle for dominance over the region, the Philistines “dug in” with some of their more unique cultural traits, to draw a sharp line between themselves and the Israelites (and partially also with the Canaanite population in the south). In practice, the Philistines used their real and imagined “foreignness” to differentiate themselves from the “natives,” as it helped them create a strong feeling of “we-ness” against the locals. But all of this changed drastically in the Iron II.

PHILISTINE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN THE IRON II

In the early Iron II, the Philistine landscape was drastically transformed.⁵ While hardly any site continued unscathed, we can divide the changes into three main types:

1. **Shrinking.** At least two of Philistia’s three megacities, Ashkelon on the coast and Ekron further inland, shrank in size and population in this period, the latter by a whopping 80 percent. The third megacity, Gath (inland), maintained its size. (Gath is exceptional in other ways in this period, as we will discuss shortly.) The fourth Philistine (excavated) center – that of Ashdod (near the coast) – which was much smaller than the other three, remained stable, or perhaps even grew somewhat.
2. **Abandonment.** Most of the mid-sized and small Iron I sites in Philistia are abandoned in the Iron IIA – for example, Tel Mor, Tel Zippor, Umm el-Baqar, Qubur al-Walaydah, Nahal Patish, Tel Ma‘aravim, the so-called Haserim, and even the larger site of Tel Haror.
3. **Change in Planning or Orientation.** Timnah (Tel Batash) and Tell el-Hesi, which were in the Philistine orbit during the Iron I, continued

⁵ Faust 2020, 2021, and references.

to exist, but the drastic changes that took place there indicate that they were now associated with the Israelite orbit. For Tell el-Hesi, which was likely a Canaanite site within the Philistine orbit, this was a simple case of shifting allegiance, but for Timnah, which was more likely a Philistine site, or that at least some Philistines lived there, the change is quite telling.⁶

These drastic changes took place parallel to the changes in the Shephelah discussed in Chapter 6, and both seem be different sides of the same coin. Before we explain what brought about these changes, we should first present what happened to Philistine material culture during this same period.

MATERIAL CULTURAL CHANGES

The drastic changes in settlement patterns were accompanied by even more dramatic material changes, and certain uniquely Philistine traits all but disappeared in the Iron II.

Pottery Style. As noted earlier in this chapter, the Philistines came with a distinctly Aegean style of decorated pottery. In the mid-to-late Iron I, their Bichrome Ware made up about half of the pottery in Philistine sites, and was even a desired import item in some Canaanite settlements.

And yet, as we have seen in Chapter 5, Bichrome Ware is discontinued entirely in the Iron II. Unlike the move from Monochrome Ware to Bichrome Ware, this is not a case of evolution from one form of Aegean-inspired pottery to another. Instead, the use of Aegean-inspired pottery completely ceased. The new decorated style that was adopted in Iron II Philistia, usually called Ashdod Ware, was completely different stylistically, and was derivative of a common “Phoenician” style (Figure 20).⁷

⁶ See also Hardin, Rollston, and Blakely 2012; Hardin and Blakely 2019.

⁷ Some scholars call this style Late Philistine Decorated Ware (LPDW). Still, as we will see, there is nothing distinctly “Philistine” in this pottery, which was used also outside Philistia and does not exhibit sharp boundaries as we see with the Philistine Aegean-inspired pottery. This is why we prefer to call it by the older name of Ashdod Ware.

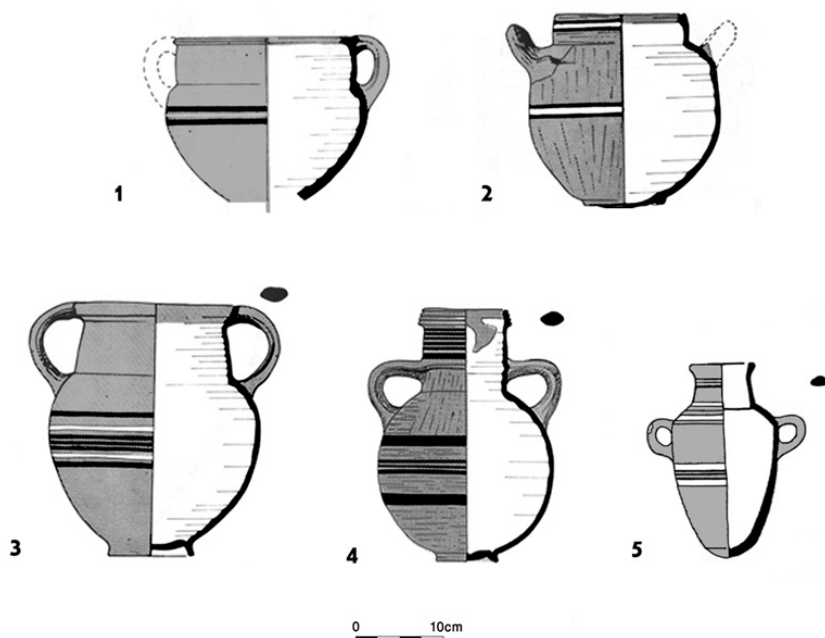


Figure 20 Sample of Ashdod Ware from Ashdod (vessels 1–4) and Gath (vessel 5) (redrawn after Ben-Shlomo 2006, figs. 1.26:12, 1.30:12; Dothan and Porath 1982, figs. 14:14, 20:2; Ben-Shlomo 2005, figs. 3.73:2; for more details see also Faust 2015c, table 3).

The differences between Bichrome Ware and Ashdod Ware are telling. First, Ashdod Ware vessels, which are red-burnished (and not while-slipped), are decorated with horizontal stripes and lack the geometric or other motifs typical of the Aegean-derived style. Out of millions or at least hundreds of thousands of Iron II red-burnished body sherds (not necessarily Ashdod Ware) found thus far, only two have what might look like Aegean decoration. The term “miniscule percentage” doesn’t even begin to cover how extremely Aegean-style decorations disappeared at this time.

Second, the vessels painted with the Ashdod Ware style are closed small vessels, generally the type used to transport oils or used in food preparation. In contrast, the types of vessels decorated in the Bichrome Ware style were mainly open drinking vessels.

Third, Ashdod Ware comprises only a tiny percentage of the assemblage in Iron Age II sites, in contrast to dozens of percent that the Bichrome Ware comprised in Iron I Philistine sites. Hence, whatever was the role of the Bichrome Ware, the Ashdod Ware simply could not have filled it.

Clearly, Ashdod Ware, with its different style, application to different vessels, and rarer use, is not a continuation or development of the Iron I Aegean-inspired “Philistine” style but reflects an abrupt sea change in pottery style.

Pork. As noted, early after the Philistines’ arrival, consumption of pork in large percentages became a hallmark of Philistine society, and as the Iron I progressed, this habit only became more dominant. In the Iron II, however, this trend reverses itself drastically, and pig bones become a rarer find in most Philistine sites, implying that they reduced this aspect of their diet. (Gath is again an exception, since pork consumption at this site remained high.)

Similar changes can be seen in other traits as well.

Writing. When the Philistines arrived in the Levant, they brought with them their own writing system. Although this has not been fully deciphered, the style is similar to the Aegean Linear script. In the Iron II, the Philistines stopped using this script and began to use a script much closer to the Phoenician and Paleo-Hebrew scripts.

Figurines. In the Iron I Philistine sites, we find Aegean-style figurines, like the Psi figurines, depicting a schematic standing female with hands uplifted. In the Iron II, most of the Aegean-inspired forms no longer appear, while “Canaanite” or “Levantine” forms reappear in this region.

Box: Deciphering the Distribution of Material Traits in Time and Space

When examining the distribution of objects or traits in time and space, we can divide the results into broad types:

1. **No pattern.** Sometimes, no patterns can be identified. For example, when some communities consume a certain type of food while others do not, but no clear boundaries or clustering can be identified. This can result from a small sample (i.e., we are missing information), or because this food was not meaningful and its consumption was arbitrary or random. Still, when no patterns are identified, there is little we can do.

Box: (cont.)

2. **Pattern.** In other cases, types of pots or foods show clear patterns of distribution, either over time or across space, and these can be divided into two types (Figure 21):
 - a. ***Gradual patterns.*** Often we can discern gradual patterns in space and time, which are what we expect to see. An example of such a pattern in space would be if a certain type of pot is produced in one place, and its popularity decreases with distance from the production center. This pattern is easy to account for. As for such a pattern in time, let's say a new group arrives at a certain place, bringing with it a new type of food which comprises a fairly significant amount of its diet. Two hundred years later we find that the percentage of this food in the group's diet has decreased. This is also expected (though not inevitable), and we would assume that after settling in their new location, the group gradually assimilated into the new physical and cultural environment, and decreased its special features.
 - b. ***Sharp patterns.*** Sometimes patterns are unexpectedly "sharp" and require an explanation. An example of such a pattern in space would be when a certain type of food (or pot) is extremely dominant in some settlements, but is completely missing from nearby, contemporaneous sites located within the same ecological niche. Sometimes, such differences can be found even within the same settlement, between neighborhoods and households (see earlier in this chapter for Stratum X at Tel Qasile). No simple straightforward ecological or economical explanations account for such a pattern, and although any explanation requires a thorough study, it is likely that the explanation should be set along cultural lines. As for such a pattern in time, we can refer to the same example presented earlier, in which a new group arrives at an area bringing with it a new type of food that comprises a fairly significant amount of its diet. But then, instead of decreasing, the consumption of this unique type of food increases in the new group's settlements over time.

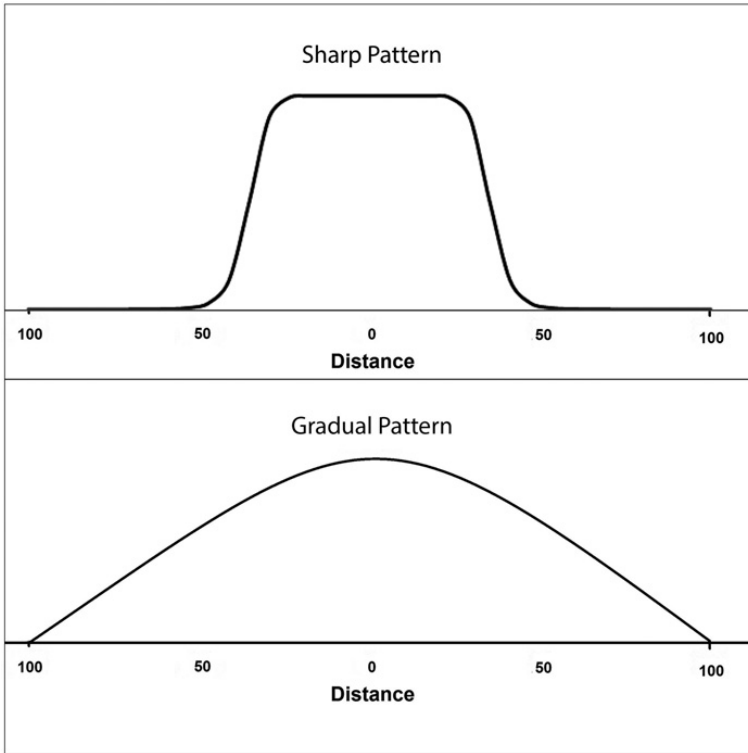
Box: (cont.)

Figure 21 A comparison of distribution patterns with sharp boundaries (top) and gradual boundaries (bottom).

This latter type of sharp pattern governs the spatial distribution of Philistine pottery and pork consumption during the Iron I, which we have explained as reflecting ethnic boundaries. Similarly, the abandonment of these traits in the Iron IIA is also a sharp pattern in time and reflects the sea change in how the Philistines express their place in the region vis-à-vis their material culture.

UNDERSTANDING PHILISTINE MATERIAL CHANGES IN THE IRON AGE IIA. What we find with the Philistines in the Iron IIA, when various traits are abandoned relatively quickly, is sharp change over time. What is more, this sudden abandonment of Aegean-inspired cultural norms is even starker considering that in the Iron I, these traits were becoming steadily more dominant in Philistine society and reflected sharp ethnic boundaries between the Philistines and the other Levantine peoples. How can we understand this wavy pattern from gradual increase to sudden and sharp decrease? How does this fit with the other changes such as site shrinkage and abandonment?

We suggest that the simplest explanation for both the material changes and the drastic changes in settlement patterns is to see this as the mirror image of what was occurring in the highlands (Chapter 4), and by extension the Shephelah (Chapter 6). When we do so, a coherent story emerges.

THE RISE AND FALL OF PHILISTINE HEGEMONY

When the Philistines arrived in the Levant, they took the southern coast of Israel by storm.⁸ They established hegemony over the region, either violently or through some other means, and settled in big cities (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron, and probably also Gaza), and most likely forced some of the local Canaanite population to live in them. How many Philistines versus Canaanites lived in these cities is unknown, and probably changed over time as more and more Canaanites assimilated and became Philistines, but the total population was large and the cities were massive.

Over time, as Philistine strength was consolidated, they began to spread their wings. First, they took advantage of the disappearance of Egypt from the region and the weakness of the Canaanite centers, especially in the south, and dominated more and more territory. As part of this push, they emphasized their unique cultural traits in contrast to the local inhabitants they wished to dominate. Their major role is revealed in

⁸ The Philistines also entered the Levant in other regions farther north, but we are concerned here only with the Philistines of the southern coast of Israel.

how all the non-Philistine inhabitants in the south – Canaanite and Israelite alike – actively sought to differentiate themselves (ethnically) from the Philistines – for example, by avoiding pork – and that even the remotest highland village avoided Philistine pottery, or any decorated pottery, for that matter. Such was their strong position in the region that other groups defined themselves by being different.

Some locals, such as the Canaanites who lived in the southern settlements, were apparently forced to accept Philistine overlordship, and Philistine power was felt even in the northern valleys, where some of the local elites used various Philistine traits, like Philistine Bichrome Ware, probably to denote status and prestige.

The Israelites in the highlands maintained clear material boundaries with the Philistines and defined themselves in stark contrast to them. This antagonism between the highlanders and the Philistines was not limited to material traits. The Philistines began raiding the highlands, perhaps even attempting to establish dominance. In response, the highlanders abandoned their villages and moved together into central sites, which they began to fortify (Chapter 4).

As these sites began to grow and organize, the highlanders also began to create more centralized leadership, likely even something akin to a monarchy, to lead the defense against the Philistine enemy. The balance of power gradually shifted from the Philistines, who were dominant in the Iron I, in favor of what emerged as the highland polity, which first pushed the Philistines out of their territory and then, within a generation or so, began to dominate the region themselves, putting the Philistines on the defensive.

As part of this process, the highland polity began to infiltrate the Shephelah. Initially, when the Philistines were still at their peak, this was done very hesitantly (e.g., at the time of the establishment of Khirbet Qeiyafa, see Chapter 6). Later, however, when the highlanders made alliances with the Canaanites, they were able to take control of the Shephelah, pushing more and more westward.

At this point, villages and small towns in Philistia were abandoned, Ashkelon and Ekron – two of the Philistine megacities – shrank, and a few sites in Philistia (e.g., Timnah and Tell el-Hesi) were transformed and probably fell to direct Israelite control.

Box: Gath in the Iron Age IIA

The megacity of Gath is exceptional in several respects. Unlike other Philistine megacities such as Ekron and Ashkelon, Gath managed to survive the Iron I–II transition in the south relatively unscathed, maintaining its size and continuing its status as a megacity in the Iron IIA. Additionally, the inhabitants did not reduce the percentage of pork they consumed in this period, in contrast to the situation in the other Philistine sites. It also appears as if they made use of a larger percentage of Ashdod Ware than other Philistine cities, although the lack of statistical information makes this conclusion tentative. Clearly, the inhabitants of Gath chose a different path during the transition to the Iron II than the other Philistines, and their process of acculturation was therefore different.

We should note that Gath is located farther inland than the other Philistine cities, and actually sits on the border between the Shephelah and the inner coastal plain. Given its location, and perhaps also due to its slightly different history (when compared to Ekron), Gath had to negotiate its identity not only in relation to the faraway Phoenicians but also against the Israelites who encroached on its hinterland. This is probably the reason the Philistines there kept some of their unique traits. For Gath, Israel remained a direct, defining “other,” and even if they were not at war, the inhabitants of Gath were in danger of being swallowed up by the growing Israelite presence. Thus, Gath was a unique Philistine polity at that time, and took a slightly different road than its fellow city-states.

This is also the time when the Philistines abandoned their purposely “foreign” traits and adopted local ones. Finding themselves no longer a dominant power in the region, they apparently gave up their dream of military or political hegemony and instead turned inward to their own economic success. Whatever the cause, whether military defeat, political maneuvering, or some other factor, the effect was that the Philistines, located mostly on the coast, were drawn into the Phoenicians economic

system. With this development, transmitting a strong message of foreignness no longer served them (both economically and politically), so they abandoned most of the Aegean-inspired traits that served them so well for some 150–200 years and adopted local (Phoenician) cultural traits.

This was so extreme a shift that some modern scholars actually argue that the Philistines assimilated and simply disappeared at this time; Trude Dothan even ends her seminal book on the Philistines with the Iron I, noting that in the Iron II they assimilated.⁹ All scholars today agree that this is an overstatement. The Philistines did not assimilate but acculturated¹⁰ since cultural differences would be a barrier to joining with the Phoenicians, who dominated a very lucrative market including all of the Mediterranean, and whose trade led indirectly to trade relations with Arabia, and even India. People like to partner with people like themselves, so the Philistines did their best to show the Phoenicians that they were just like them.

⁹ Dothan 1982. ¹⁰ Following Stone 1995.

CHAPTER 8

Building in the Swamps of the Sharon Plain

THE RIDDLE: FOR MUCH OF HISTORY, the area in the Land of Israel known as the Sharon Plain was only sparsely inhabited, and its demography suffered severe fluctuations. In the Iron Age IIA, settlement there peaked and then, before the Iron Age IIB, it suddenly plummeted. What caused this unusual fluctuation?

The red sandy soils (*hamra*) of the Sharon Plain are of poor quality, and until the nineteenth century or the early twentieth, were hardly used for agriculture. Good alluvium soil can be found only in the river valleys, which were very limited in size. Moreover, because the Sharon flatland is intersected by a series of ridges of soft sandstone called *kurkar*, its many streams, all of which flow into the Mediterranean, do not drain well. Instead, they back up into the plain and form marshes and swamps. This made even the alluvial valleys difficult to exploit.

For most of history, going back to ancient times, the area was covered in dense forest of Tabor oaks, and some have suggested that its name may derive from the obscure Semitic word for “woods” found in Old Akkadian, *šarānu*. The swampy Sharon was apparently deforested in the nineteenth century, first by Egyptian ruler Ibrahim Pasha in the 1830s and then by the Ottoman Turks, leaving the Sharon Plain as a flat, malarial marshland, which it remained as late as the early twentieth century.

The watery *hamra* soil of the Sharon Plain is not very suitable for growing classic agricultural crops such as wheat, and in ancient times, this sparsely inhabited swampland was known as an out-of-the-way region famous for its oak forests and exotic flowers. See, for example, the phrase in Song of Songs in which the woman refers to herself as an exotic “lily of

the Sharon” (2:1). The few times in the ancient period when it was settled, it was usually when its seashore sites were essential for trade.¹

THE SHARON VALLEY IN THE BRONZE AND IRON AGES

The region had its share of settlement in the Early Bronze Age I (roughly fourth millennium BCE), but was practically devoid of settlement during the Early Bronze II–III, which was the first period of urbanization in the Levant, covering most of the third millennium BCE. Settlement gradually resumed afterward, reaching an unprecedented peak during the Middle Bronze Age (first half of the second millennium BCE), after which it declined (but did not disappear) in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I.

Settlements that existed during the latter period included Tel Qasile on the Yarkon River, and not far from it, also along the Yarkon, was the settlement of Tel Gerisa. Farther east, by the Yarkon springs, which lie at the foothills of the Samarian Highlands, was Tel Aphek. Another possible settlement in this period is Tel Hefer, midway between Netanya and Hadera. Finally, farther north, near Hadera, a small settlement existed in Tel Zeror (Figure 22).

In the Iron IIA – most excavators speak specifically about the tenth century BCE (a point to which we shall return later) – the settlement of the Sharon became denser: All the Iron I settlements continued to exist in some form or another. For example, while the last Iron I town at Tel Qasile – Stratum X – was destroyed in the early tenth century BCE, the subsequent Stratum IX was similar in many ways (although with some major changes that will be discussed at length later in this chapter). At Tel Gerisa, the Iron IIA settlement covered a smaller area and was significantly altered – the earlier remains were leveled, and grey soil was placed on it, apparently part of the foundation of the Iron IIA construction. Settlement at Aphek continued, with changes through a number of phases, throughout the Iron IIA. And at Tel Hefer the poor Iron I remains were sealed by a layer of earth that leveled the center of the

¹ The ideas presented in the main part of this chapter are based on Faust 2007, 2018b, and most of the basic bibliography can be found there.

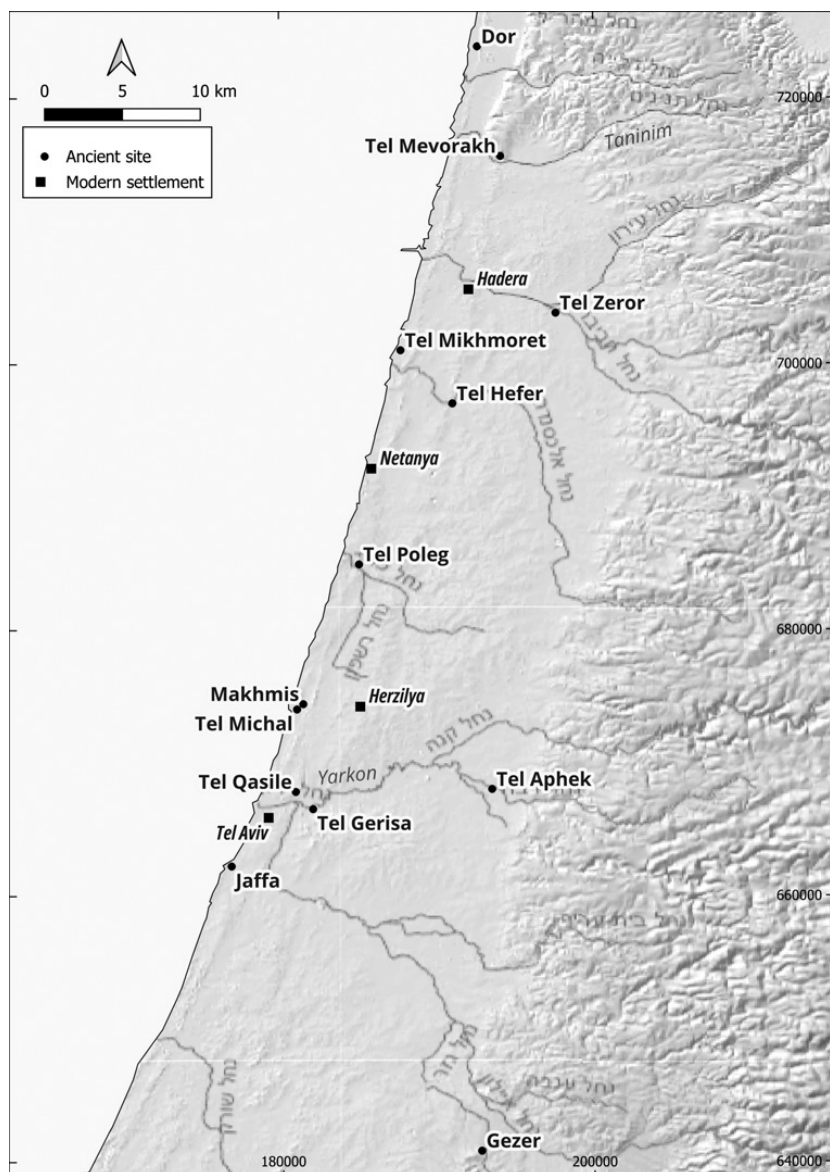


Figure 22 Map of the Sharon settlement (based on LISROP map; see Faust and Shweka 2023; 2024).

site and prepared it for more substantial construction, apparently at some stage in the Iron IIA, but its nature and exact date are unclear. At Tel Zeror settlement continued, albeit also with some changes.

In addition to these continued sites, new settlements were established in the region as well:

- **Tel Michal and its satellites.** About four miles north of the Yarkon, in the area of modern-day Herzilya, Tel Michal was founded, along with three small sites to its east, and Makhmis, a satellite to its northeast.
- **Tel Poleg.** A site on the Poleg Stream, just south of modern-day Netanya, was resettled at the time, after a long settlement gap.
- **Tel Mikhmoret.** A site in the middle of the Sharon Valley, on the Mediterranean coast. Some activity was resumed there in or around the tenth century.
- **Tel Mevorakh.** On the northern edge of the Sharon Plain, on the Taninim Stream. The finds include a large LFS house, and the excavators suggest that it was an administrative center (see Excursus 6.1).

While the Sharon as a whole flourished by comparison to other periods, most of the prosperity seems to have concentrated in a string of sites along the Yarkon basin, some of which might have been associated with Jaffa, located slightly to the south of the river, on the coast.

CRISIS IN THE IRON IIB? If the change in population density in the Sharon from Iron Age I to Iron Age IIA can be fairly characterized as significant if not exactly sharp, the change from Iron IIA to Iron IIB can only be characterized as drastic. Almost every single settlement in the Sharon was abandoned, with no continuation into the Iron IIB. Indeed, the lack of Iron IIB remains in most sites is a clear indication that the sites ceased to exist *before* this period – that is, at some point *during* the Iron IIA. Most excavators explicitly attributed the Iron IIA settlements in the Sharon to the tenth century only. In the ninth century, the population plummeted from one of the highest it had ever been to almost entirely uninhabited.

The only sites known to have existed in the eighth century BCE between the Yarkon and Nahal Taninim are Tel Mikhmoret (ephemeral remains) and Tel Zeror (a village), and perhaps Tel Michal, where some activity might have been resumed after a gap. Tel Mikhmoret, for instance, might have served as poor anchorages for ships that had to stay there during the night, and other sites may have had similar uses, but we have no evidence of real towns or even large villages, let alone a functioning settlement system.

What could have caused the peak of the Iron IIA, and then the massive downturn in population? To answer this question, we need to turn to the most significant political difference in the region between the Iron IIA and the Iron IIB.

THE EARLY IRON IIA PROSPERITY IN THE SHARON

Why did settlement flourish in the Iron IIA in the Sharon at large, and especially in the Yarkon basin? The sites were not erected because of the agricultural potential of the area, as this was very low. The evidence for agricultural activity in the area, in the form of a few winepresses unearthed, for example, at Tel Michal, was a result of people living there, and was not what drew people to the region.

The main force pulling people to the region was most likely its ability to benefit from the maritime trade that passed along its coasts and channel some of it inland. Admittedly, the Sharon coasts lack real harbors, unlike the regions to its north (e.g., Dor) and south (e.g., Jaffa). Nevertheless, the mouth of the various rivers, all of which flow into the Mediterranean Sea, could serve as safe anchorages, and settlements farther inland served as intermediaries between the anchorages and the inland centers. Maritime trade grew significantly with the advent of the Iron Age II, and from this perspective, the Sharon settlement growth in the Iron IIA should not come as a surprise.

But if maritime trade was the cause of settlement prosperity, why don't we have dozens of Iron IIB towns in the Sharon? Trade, after all, peaked at the time, as did social complexity. If someone invested in the Iron IIA settlements in this region, especially in the Yarkon basin, why wasn't that someone interested in the region during the Iron IIB? The answer has to do with the important political differences between the Iron IIA and the Iron IIB.

During the Iron IIB, the major political powers in the Cisjordan were the kingdom of Israel, dominating the north, and the kingdom of Judah in the south. During this period, the entire Sharon was incorporated

within the northern kingdom, Israel. The latter, however, did not need it as an outlet to the sea.

The Yarkon basin, which had been the most settled part of the region in the Iron IIA, was at the southern extremity of the territory, and was especially marginal for the kingdom's commercial purposes given its distance from Israel's major centers. And while the northern Sharon was close to the capital in Samaria, the kingdom's natural outlet was at Dor, a major city located on a natural harbor that served as the main port of the northern kingdom. The marginality of the region for the northern kingdom explains the neglect of the swampy Sharon at large, and particularly the Yarkon basin, during the Iron IIB. Without revenue from ports, it is not worth the expense of supporting settlements there.

So why did the region flourish earlier? The key is in understanding who could benefit from investing in this region, and especially the Yarkon basin. The latter would have been especially important when the political center that wished to benefit from the maritime trade was located in a limited area encompassing southern Samaria, northern Judah, or the northernmost part of the Shephelah, somewhere between Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Gezer. Only a polity whose center was in this area would benefit from controlling the Yarkon basin and would invest in this otherwise marginal area. From the mouth of the Yarkon (or Tel Qasile), goods could be shipped up the Yarkon River and then transported on land over the rather short distance to this region. While the center could have been in any city within the triangle defined earlier, it is quite clear that the only reasonable candidate is Jerusalem. The mere pattern supports the existence of the United Monarchy, with its center in this region.

Moreover, while it is not always easy to decide whether the pottery in the Sharon sites should be attributed to the tenth or the ninth century (see Excursus 8.2), only the highland polity of the tenth century could account for the region's prosperity; in the ninth century, when the area was under the control of the northern kingdom, the main port was at Dor (more later in this chapter).

The actual finds from the Yarkon basin lend themselves to this scenario. During the Iron I, Tel Qasile was most likely a Canaanite settlement under Philistine hegemony. Stratum X was destroyed in a massive conflagration in the early tenth century, and Stratum IX was subsequently (re)built on a more limited scale, apparently under Israelite hegemony.

One of the outstanding features of Tel Qasile was the existence of a temple there. The temple compound was first constructed with the site's establishment in Stratum XII, was enlarged in Stratum XI, and reached its zenith in Stratum X, the largest of all. After Stratum X was destroyed, however, the city was rebuilt (Stratum IX) without the temple. While a few of its walls were reused, the temple as such was not rebuilt and, as Amihai Mazar writes, "was probably left as an unroofed ruin."²

We will elaborate on the significance of the cessation of the use of the temples in Excursus 8.1, but suffice it to say that this is a drastic change that is not unique to Tel Qasile; it was a hallmark of what happened to Canaanite cities when Israel took over, and thus indicates that the Israelites had built the Stratum IX city and were the likely culprits responsible for Stratum X's destruction.

Turning to the northern edge of the Sharon, we find Tel Mevorach. The sudden appearance of a new settlement there, probably an administrative center with a well-built LFS house (Excursus 6.1), is likely connected with the nearby flourishing port city of Dor. The latter was clearly inhabited and operated by Phoenicians, and the erection of the center at Tel Mevorak was part of the highland polity's attempt to dominate the region.

The Israelites could not master the maritime trade,³ and they probably knew it,⁴ so they left the city itself to the Phoenicians and

² Mazar 2009: 327.

³ From a maritime perspective, Dor was a major trading center, whereas Tel Qasile was just a small port serving ships that passed in the area. Its importance for the highland polity lay in its domination of the Yarkon, the nearest connecting point between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean trade.

⁴ Even in the rare cases when the Bible describes Israelite maritime ventures, this is always described as carried out with the Phoenicians. Regardless of the historicity of these descriptions, the Israelites clearly did not consider themselves capable of mastering the sea.

controlled it only indirectly by various agreements with the local Phoenician population. The erection of the center nearby enabled the highland polity to remind the Phoenicians of its presence, and also, perhaps, to extract its share of the profits. With Tel Qasile in the south and Tel Mevorakh in the north, we can see that the highland polity expanded into the Sharon and incorporated the region into its political and cultural sphere.

THE DECLINE OF THE SHARON AND THE YARKON BASIN SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

It is likely, as was suggested by the original excavators of some of the sites, that many settlements were destroyed by Shishak in his campaign or abandoned in its wake. Still, even if sites were destroyed in the campaign, why weren't they simply rebuilt? The Mediterranean trade was, after all, still important in this period, and even grew.

This is why we suggest that the key factor is the change in the political situation in this period. The entity that built the sites, namely the highland polity, no longer existed when Shishak visited the region and it could not therefore rebuild the sites, nor was there anyone who had an interest in sustaining the system as a whole.

The northern kingdom inherited the control over the Sharon and the Yarkon basin, but not only did it take it some time to consolidate its control, given the location of its political center, the region was simply insignificant for it. And the southern kingdom, whose capital was still in Jerusalem, was a small, landlocked polity. It could have benefited from the region, of course, but it did not control it.

This is why sites that were not directly destroyed by Shishak were also impacted. As the settlements did not sustain themselves, they were dependent on the economic system that benefited from the control over the region. Once the region was of no importance for the polity that controlled it, the remaining settlers gradually lost their livelihood and moved to other regions.

Thus most of the sites did not recover. Some sites, like Aphek, which controlled the international highway that passed in the valley between the Sharon and the Samarian highlands, were rebuilt, but most others declined and disappeared. Once the region lost its geopolitical importance, there was nobody to invest and maintain settlement in this swampy land, and no substantial settlement was resumed for centuries.

SUMMARY

The unique settlement history of the Sharon is in line with the existence of an early Iron IIA polity centered in Jerusalem, and with the demise of this polity at some point during the Iron IIA, thereby lending credibility to the existence of the highland polity.

In Chapter 15, we will see some interesting parallels between the archaeological finds and (indirect) information contained in the Bible, further augmenting the historicity of the highland polity. But for now (Excursus 8.1), we would like to expand on a major transformation that took place in Tel Qasile (as well as in other sites) and that symbolizes the changes that occurred in the early tenth century BCE, when an area was captured by the highland kingdom.

EXCURSUS 8.1 ISRAELITE EXPANSION AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TEMPLES

In the pre-Israelite southern Levant, it was standard for cities and even villages to have a temple – that is, a building devoted to a god or a goddess and serving as his or her house. In the Late Bronze Age, for instance, the period right before the appearance of the Israelite highland villages, anything between twenty and forty temples have been uncovered so far in excavations. (Forty is if you trust all the suggestions; twenty is if you are extremely suspicious of the excavators' interpretation.)⁵

Megiddo, Shechem, Pella, Hazor, Lachish, Beth Shean, Tell abu Kharaz, Tel Kitan, and many others all had temples. Large enough cities often had more than one. At Beth Shean, for instance, two temples were unearthed, while the huge city of Hazor had at least four. Lachish also had three temples – two inside the city and one outside it, reflecting another form of temple – shrines built outside cities, examples of which were found also at the Amman Airport and near Tel Mevorach. Another type of temple, apparently in the service of the local miners, was unearthed at Timna in the south.

Even Canaanite villages probably had their own temples. Although no Late Bronze villages have been excavated sufficiently at this point, six Middle Bronze villages have been – Tell el-Hayyat, Tel Kitan, Givat Sharet, Nahal Rephaim, Manahat, and Kfar Rupin – and at least the first five, and probably all six, had temples. This continued into the Iron I for cities on the plains and in areas outside the Israelite settlement such as Megiddo, Beth Shean, and Tel Qasile.

We should note that the exposure of the Late Bronze Age strata is quite limited, as settlement at this time was small and many sites were not even settled. Moreover, the relevant strata are buried deep in the mounds, and this also limits their exposure, as even when settlement did exist, the area excavated was usually very small. That

⁵ For the Bronze Age temples, see, for example, Mazar 1992; Greener 2019; and also Faust 2019a. For the changes in Iron Age Israel, see Halpern 2000: 559, 2001: 474; Ottosson 1980: 106; Stager 1999; Faust 2010, 2019d. For extended discussion and references, see Faust 2021b.

many temples were unearthed despite the relatively limited exposure is a strong indication that each city and village had at least one such structure.

Things were different in the Iron I highland villages, and this continued later, into the Iron II. By this time, temples were no longer standard features in cities in Israel and Judah. And when Israelites began to take over Canaanite cities, the local temples disappeared.

The earliest example of such a change – already during the Iron I – is Shechem, which sits in the very heart of what would become the highland polity and was likely absorbed by its inhabitants and their culture early on. As such, the Fortress Temple (Strata XVI–XV), familiar from the Canaanite levels of occupation, was destroyed and never rebuilt in the later, probably Israelite phases. That this was not happenstance but the beginning of a pattern that would solidify once Israel became a state, can be seen by looking at what happened to four such cities in the Iron II.

A particularly stark example is Megiddo, which had a major temple throughout the Bronze Age and into the Iron I phase VIA (ending around 980/970 BCE). In the next phases, VB, VA/IVB, and IV, it is without a temple. Similarly, Beth Shean had two temples in the Bronze and Iron I (Stratum VI), but both of these were replaced by administrative buildings in the Iron IIA (Stratum V).

At Hazor, too, although the Late Bronze Age city boasted a number of temples, the small Iron IIA city built in the tenth century BCE contained no known temples, and this tradition persisted until the destruction of the city by the Assyrians. Even more striking is the fact that the area of one the Canaanite cultic complex, which was located within the Iron Age city, was left as an unbuilt, empty area: “The Israelite city developed around these ruins and always avoided building on top of them, possibly as a result of some sort of building ban on this location.”⁶ Finally, Tel Qasile (discussed earlier in this chapter) also fits this pattern. This Yarkon Valley site had a temple in its Iron I phases (Strata XII–X), but the Iron IIA city (Stratum IX) did not.

⁶ Sandhaus 2013: 111.

LACK OF TEMPLES IN THE HIGHLANDS

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the disappearance of temples in these sites is not happenstance. Rather, the lack of temples reflects the cultic reality in the highlands. Unlike all other excavated regions in the area, the Iron I towns and villages in the highlands for the most part did not build temples. Instead, the highland settlers, namely the Israelites, made use of open spaces or cultic corners for religious purposes – not buildings that were erected as a house of a god/goddess.

This tendency not to use temples, or to build them quite sparingly, continues throughout the existence of the Israel and Judah. In addition to the temple in Jerusalem – which we know about only from the Bible – archaeology has uncovered, at most, only three more temples, each existing for only part of the Iron II: Arad in the Negev, Dan in the north, and Moza, near Jerusalem.

The absence is even starker when we take into consideration that the Iron Age II has been much more heavily excavated than the Late Bronze Age. Around ten times as many Iron II buildings have been excavated than Late Bronze buildings such that, if temple building were as common in Israel and Judah as it was in Late Bronze Age Canaan, we should have found ten times as many temples – a hundred Iron Age temples would be a *conservative* estimate. But instead, we have found only three. Even if archaeology were to uncover a few more in the future (and we expect that this will be the case), the picture is decidedly different than Bronze Age Canaan.

One phrase best explains the changes identified in the Iron II cities of Megiddo, Beth-Shean, Hazor, and Tel Qasile (and Shechem): Israelite control. Megiddo, Beth-Shean, and Tel Qasile were conquered, destroyed, and rebuilt, and it is quite clear that, when they were rebuilt, this was done in a completely different manner – the Israelite way – without a temple. (Shechem and Hazor went through a similar, but not identical, process.)

We already saw (Excursus 6.1) that the establishment of large, formal LFS houses marked the expansion of the highland polity, helping delineate its boundaries. The cessation of the use of temples when cities were rebuilt seems to be another indication for the expansion of this polity (see Figure 16).

EXCURSUS 8.2 ON THE DATING OF THE SHARON SITES

After the idea presented in this chapter was first suggested by Faust in 2007, Zeev Herzog and Lily Singer-Avitz lowered the date of some of the sites that the original excavators dated to the tenth century, to the ninth.⁷ This attempt, however, is problematic.

First of all, their dating is based on the acceptance (to a degree) of the Low Chronology advocated by Finkelstein, which is not accepted by the majority of scholars (see Excursus 3.1). And, in the process, they reject the excavators' dating. More importantly, the division between the tenth and the ninth centuries based on the pottery assemblages is artificial, as the assemblages in some of the sites are too small to allow for such fine distinctions between the Iron IIA subphases.

Indeed, the mere chronological division seems arbitrary and creates unexplained and random gaps in the settlement of most coastal sites.⁸ The arbitrary division led them to reconstruct a process in which not a single site they studied existed continuously from the end of the Iron I to the Iron IIB, and all exhibit a gap at some point – but not at the same time! This is a result of an artificial division whose aim was to blur the clear pattern and disassociate the sites from the United Monarchy.

Moreover, not only isn't this random division supported by the data, but it is nonsensical when examined against the historical and geopolitical circumstances of the time. Who invested at Tel Gerisa and Tel Hefer and created a leveled ground in order to build the new houses in the ninth century? They do not offer an explanation to this, nor, it appears, can they.

Ironically, Herzog and Singer-Avitz use the architectural changes between the Iron IIA strata in some sites and their Iron I predecessors (e.g., in Tel Gerisa and Tel Mevorach) to claim that this must have resulted from a time gap between the two phases, during which the sites were uninhabited. This, however, is turning the argument on its head.

⁷ Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2011.

⁸ See the table on page 171 of their article. For the tenth-century dating of most sites (in line with ours), see also Dever 2017: 268.

It is the drastic changes in these, and other sites (e.g., Tel Qasile, Tel Hefer), that show that the new settlements were erected purposely by an outside power. Should settlers return after a period of abandonment, they would not have completely leveled the sites and then filled them with a different type of soil in order to create almost a podium (this is expected when a state takes over and completely rebuilds a settlement to fit its needs). Thus, the architectural changes, along with the spatial-chronological changes (and the cultural one, as presented in Excursus 8.1), are in line with the existence of an outside power, centered in the area of Jerusalem, that invested in this region in the tenth century BCE – that is, the highland polity.

CHAPTER 9

The Beersheba Valley, the Settlement of the Negev Highlands, and the Copper Mines of Edom

THE RIDDLE: DURING THE IRON IIA, we witness a surprising settlement wave in the Negev Highlands after a millennium during which the area was devoid of settlements. This is accompanied by a drastic transformation in the settlement in the Beersheba Valley and an unparalleled peak in Aravah copper production. What led to all these concurrent changes? Are they all connected? And if so, how?

The term *Negev* serves today to denote the entire dry region in the south of Israel, from the area of the Beersheba–Arad Valley to Eilat. This is an arid land that moves from steppe to desert as one goes further south. In fact, the biblical name Negev comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for dry.¹

The situation in the Negev is particularly complex since it presents a number of interlocking problems (Figure 23). It will help if we divide the area by subregions, including (1) the Beersheba–Arad Valley in the north, (2) the Negev Highlands in the south, and (3) the Aravah in the east. We will start with the Beersheba–Arad Valley, located at the midpoint between the Mediterranean coast on the west and the Dead Sea on the east. This is the part of the region that the Bible refers to as the Negev (in contrast to modern usage).

¹ The data in this chapter is based on many works, the most important of which will be referenced in what follows. The basic outlines of the present reconstructions, though much less updated, were presented in Faust 2006c.

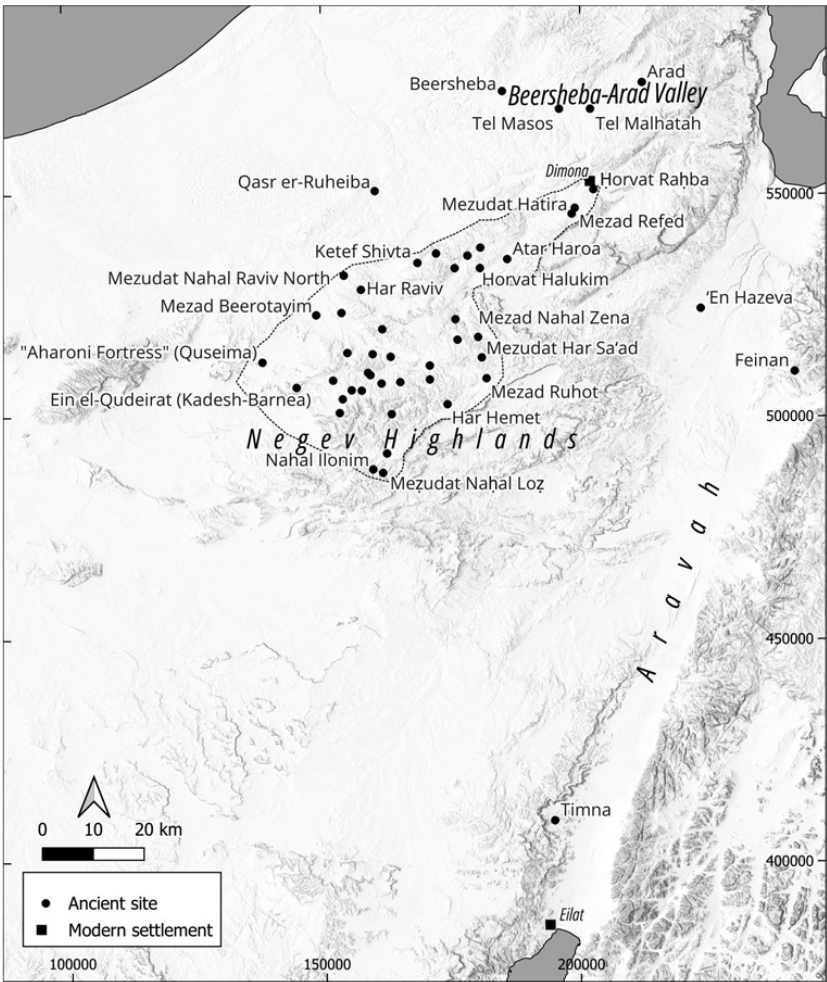


Figure 23 Map of the south. The polygon marks the approximate boundaries of the “Negev fortresses” phenomenon (base map: Esri, USGS, Airbus DS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community).

THE GROWTH OF BEERSHEBA AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TEL MASOS

After a few centuries in the Late Bronze Age in which no large settlement existed in the Beersheba Valley, settlement resumed in the Iron I, when a small village was founded at Tel Masos. This village expanded over time

into what one might call a small town (Stratum II), while more sites were gradually established in the area, such as Nahal Yatir, Tel Esdar, and Tel Beersheba, reaching a peak in the late Iron I.²

Throughout, Tel Masos remained the largest site in the area. Culturally speaking, it was a cosmopolitan town for its time. Its inhabitants made use of imports from various regions, as well foreign architectural traditions including what might be viewed as imitation Egyptian-style architecture, and a few of the structures were built in the proto-LFS tradition.

In the early Iron IIA, the situation in this area significantly shifted:

1. The town of Tel Masos Stratum II, as well as some of its smaller satellites, were all abandoned.
2. Other sites, however, continued and even prospered. Beersheba continued, though it was rebuilt along new lines, and later in the Iron IIA, it developed into a planned, urban settlement (Stratum V). To the east of the Beersheba Valley, a new village was founded at Tel Arad, and after a few more decades, a fortress was constructed in its place.
3. At some point in the tenth century BCE, Tel Malhatah (southwest of Arad) was constructed as a fortified settlement.³

Why was the Iron I settlement system abandoned, and who built the new settlements? Before answering these questions, we must first turn to another phenomenon occurring at this same time: the settlement of the Negev Highlands.

² For example, Aharoni 1979b; Herzog 1994; Finkelstein 1996b; Faust 2006c. Finkelstein and Herzog have since changed some of their views, but the patterns they identified are still significant and beg an explanation.

³ For most of the sites, see the previous note. For the traditional view of Tel Malhatah, see Kochavi 1993: 949–950. Following the general approach of the Low Chronology, the TAU expedition gradually pushed down the date, initially to the late tenth century (Beit Arie 2011: 20–21) and eventually even to the ninth century (Beit Arie, Freud, and Tal 2015: 740, published only after the death of the excavator, Itzhaq Beit-Arie). This downdating was largely based on the assumption that there were no fortifications in the early Iron IIA, so a fortified site must by definition be later than the tenth century. This assumption, however, has proven wrong – as we have seen throughout this book – and thus there is no reason to downdate the site.

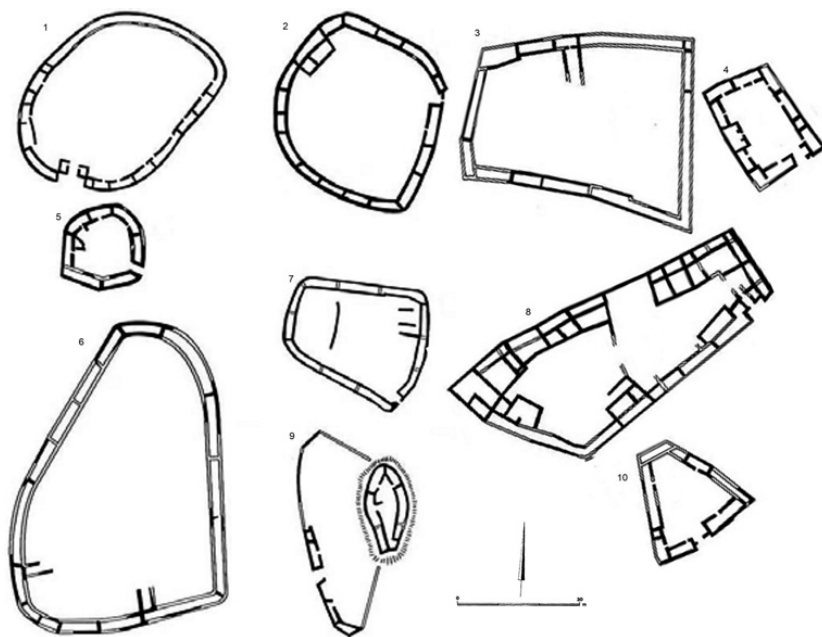


Figure 24 Sample of plans of “Negev fortresses”: 1. Ain Qudeis; 2. Atar Haroa; 3. Mezaḏ Refeḏ; 4. Horvat Har Boqer; 5. Horvat Halukim; 6. Horvat Rahba; 7. Horvat Ketef Shivta; 8. Mezaḏ Hatira; 9. Ramat Matred fort; 10. Horvat Ramat Boqer (redrawn after Cohen 1979: 65, 68).

NEW SETTLEMENTS IN THE NEGEV HIGHLANDS

The Negev Highlands had been mostly empty of significant settlement throughout the second millennium BCE. This changed in the early Iron IIA, when, almost out of the blue, around 350 new sites appeared in its northwestern section from Dimona in the northeast to Ein el-Qudeirat (Kadesh-Barnea) in the southwest.⁴

At the core of this new settlement enterprise were about sixty relatively large, fortified structures, generally known in scholarship as the “Negev fortresses”, whose main – and in some cases only – architectural feature is a casemate wall (Figure 24). The term casemate wall refers to two thin, parallel walls, with smaller perpendicular walls connecting them at

⁴ For example, Cohen 1979; Finkelstein 1984, 1996b, 2014; Meshel 1994; Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004; Faust 2006c; Haiman 2012.

various intervals, and creating rooms (casemates) that encircle an open central courtyard. The living spaces in these fortified structures were generally inside the casemate rooms.

In addition to these fortified settlements were further settlement remains, some near them and other scattered between them, including a few hamlets as well as isolated dwellings, agricultural installations, pens for livestock, and unique, wide, open cisterns (these last differ from typical cisterns, which are usually bell shape, i.e., narrow at the top). Notably, some of the larger buildings unearthed in the region, and especially some of those built adjacent to the fortified structures, were of the LFS type, often in the classical form.

The pottery assemblage – the most common find in these sites – is an unusual blend: 60 percent of the pottery was composed of the typical “northern” forms of this era discussed in Chapter 5, while 40 percent was coarse, handmade pottery known as Negev (or Negbite) Ware.

THEORY #1 ISRAELITE MILITARY FORTS. Ever since the first fortified sites were discovered, scholars have attempted to understand why they were built and who built them. When the first buildings were uncovered, it was thought that these were military forts, used by the United Monarchy or the kingdom of Judah, to guard the important road to the Gulf of Eilat.

This view was soon dispelled once more systematic research was conducted, since it turned out that the distribution of these sites is limited to the higher, northern parts of the Negev Highlands, from Dimona to Qadesh Barnea. In other words, these forts couldn’t have guarded the road to Eilat, as most of it stretches farther south. Thus scholars working with this model adjusted their thinking and argued that the forts were built to guard the kingdom’s southern border.

Once scholars realized that these structures were in existence mostly in the tenth century BCE – that is, during the time of the United Monarchy – the model was tweaked further. It was suggested that they were built by either David or Solomon and destroyed during the campaign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shoshenq I (the biblical Shishak) in the late tenth century. This campaign, which is briefly mentioned in the Bible only in connection to Jerusalem, is described in a detailed account

in an inscription in Karnak composed for Pharaoh Shoshenq, which mentions dozens of sites in the Negev by name (see also Chapter 15).

Despite these tweaks in purpose and dating, the reigning assumption was that the fortified sites were built by the United Monarchy and that, as military forts, they were certainly defensive in nature, with various scholars offering different explanations as to the exact cause for their being built.⁵ We will revisit some of these suggestions later in this chapter.

THEORY #2 AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS BUILT BY NOMADIC TRIBES. The first to reject the “royal” interpretation was Beno Rothenberg (1914–2012), best known for his work at Timna (discussed later in this chapter). The objections of Rothenberg and others who followed suit, such as David Eitam and Israel Finkelstein, were based on several points, including:⁶

1. **Location.** The physical location of the sites, most of which are located on small hills and not on the highest peak in the area, does not support the military function.
2. **Design.** The walls of the forts are too thin to withstand a military attack or siege. Moreover, the structures are not uniform in form and size, which would have been expected in government-initiated military construction.
3. **Distribution.** The distribution of the “forts” is not in line with military aims, as the sites are concentrated in a limited area within the larger Negev Highlands. Moreover, even within this area, their distribution is not even: In some subareas, many sites are located in great proximity to one another, while in others, the structures are further apart.
4. **Agriculture.** The widespread evidence for agricultural activity in these sites suggests civilian activities, not military ones. This latter point is clinched once we take into account that the “forts” are just the tip of the iceberg. As noted, in addition to the sixty or so fortified structures uncovered in the Negev Highlands, hundreds of additional sites such

⁵ For example, Cohen 1979; Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004; Haiman 2012, and references.

⁶ See Rothenberg 1967; Eitam 1979; Finkelstein 1984, 1996b.

as hamlets and agricultural installations were found, pointing to the likelihood that the settlement wave was agricultural in nature.

5. **Negev Ware.** The coarse, handmade Negev Ware does not reflect Israelite culture but that of the desert's nomadic population.

These scholars therefore suggested that the sites were not Israelite forts, but rather were agricultural settlements built by local nomadic groups such as Amalekites or Edomites that began to settle down. These scholars also redated the sites to the Iron I, before Israelite expansion and attributed the destruction (not construction) to Saul or David in the tenth century. Finkelstein and others suggested a connection between the Negev Highland sites and Tel Masos and its satellites, located only slightly north of the Negev settlements, which they viewed as the center ("capital") of the entire phenomenon and which they called the "Tel Masos Chieftdom."

REASSESSING THEORY #2. Although it highlights a number of important points, most scholars pushed back against the nomadic settlement model. First, some of the criticisms of the military view do not hold water.⁷

For instance, the fact that the sites were located on small hills rather than on the highest peaks (=1. Location), does not prove they are not military, since most ancient forts are not supposed to be strategically located and to see from a distance, but to tactically control from nearby (and most can observe long segment of the wadis, which served as roads). The lower hills near wadis are often far better for such tactical purposes than high peaks. In other words, while the system as a whole can be strategically important, the location of most individual structures within it were usually dictated by tactical considerations. Similarly, such forts were not necessarily built to withstand sieges as much as to garrison troops, and thus the thin walls would not contradict their functioning as military (=2. Design).

More importantly, the nomadic settlement view is not really viable. First, a nomadic group settling voluntarily en masse and building such uniformly "enclosed" structures would be unprecedented. Such settlement generally

⁷ See Meshel 1994; Faust 2006c.

begins with dispersed tents and buildings scattered across the landscape, and perhaps some tiny villages, not a phenomenon of similarly enclosed, or fortified structures.

Moreover, pastoral nomadic groups are generally active near settlements, and not dozens or even hundreds of kilometers away. The sparsity of settlement south of the Shephelah and the Hebron hills in the Late Bronze Age, and south of the Beersheba Valley during the Iron I, means that for a millennium before the time discussed here, the pastoral groups would have wandered mostly to the north, in the Beersheba Valley and perhaps even farther north. Hence, if they were to just settle down, this is where we would expect to find these settlements.

Additionally, the dating of the sites to the eleventh century, while convenient for the nomad hypothesis, is simply not possible. First, the northern pottery, which comprises 60 percent of the ceramic assemblage there, is clearly dated to the Iron IIA, as is admitted today by Finkelstein and others who were previously proponents of an earlier date. Second, recent radiometric dating show that even if it might have started slightly earlier, most of the sites were in use in the Iron IIA (not Iron I), and even that at least some extend into the ninth century BCE.⁸

This dating disproves the “Tel Masos Chiefdom” hypothesis, as the pottery in Tel Masos II is earlier, and is dated mostly to the end of the Iron I and the very beginning of the Iron IIA. Moreover, the Negev Ware, so common in the Negev Highland sites, and which was one of the main reasons these sites were associated with nomadic tribes in the first place, is all but entirely absent from Tel Masos.

A COMPROMISE? STATE-INITIATED “AGRICULTURAL”

SETTLEMENTS? Even though nomad settlement is not a viable explanation, we need to account for the coarse handmade pottery (=5. Negev Ware) – 40 percent of the pottery found in these sites. Such pottery is unknown in Israelite sites to the north and is clearly “local” in origin. Moreover, the widespread evidence for agricultural activity in these sites does suggest civilian activities, not merely military ones (=4. Agriculture).

⁸ For dates, see, for example, Boaretto, Finkelstein, and Shahack-Gross 2010.

The uneven distribution of the sites (=3. Distribution) also begs an explanation.

Given the contradictory evidence, it seems clear that we are not discussing fortresses in the full sense of the word. Consequently, Zeev Meshel, an archaeologist from Tel Aviv University – one of the leading scholars of the Negev, having spent much of his career working in the region – suggested a more nuanced version of the forts theory.

According to Meshel's proposal, the initiative for the construction of the casemate-ringed enclosures was likely of the monarchy, since only a centralized government can build sixty fortified enclosures in such a short time, and it aimed to take control of the area. Nevertheless, given the evidence for agriculture, the great diversity in the form and size of the structures, their concentration in the only part of the Negev Highlands where agriculture is possible, their uneven distribution even within this region, and the great popularity of the Negev Ware, he suggested that much of the population inhabiting the areas were probably local nomads. These people would have been the workforce who built these fortified structures, which may help explain the great variation in the structures' size and form: the fortified structures were simply built on hilltops, along contours dictated by the topography.⁹

The fact that agriculture was a major part of the settlement also explains the uneven distribution of the sites: Their location was likely motivated by ecological considerations, as the sites were supposed to be largely self-sustained agricultural settlements.

Meshel's schematic suggestion points us in the right direction, and we embrace this intermediate approach. The sites were basically civilian, but they were erected as a part of a northern initiative.

Meshel leaves unexplained, however, how a state initiative could make these nomads settle down and build the sites. Furthermore, we have seen that nomads were active near settlements, and hence they did not previously live in large numbers in the Negev Highlands. Thus, to complete the theory, we suggest that the settlers were brought from other regions and were settled there by the northern polity, through coercion, incentives, or both. To explain how and why this was the case, we need to

⁹ Meshel 1994.

unpack what purpose this settlement initiative served and whence the non-Israelite population came.

FRONTIER SETTLEMENT. A crucial point is that the entire settlement complex – that is, the casemate structures, the villages, and the isolated buildings – was engaged, in addition to herding, in agriculture. As Israel Finkelstein noted in 1995:

[F]inds from both excavations and survey attest to strong agricultural and pastoral activities of the inhabitants of the sites ... grinding stones, mortars, stone basins and sickle blades found at almost all the sites excavated, “fortresses” and simple houses alike, point to a relatively high level of dry-farming. The same is true for silos and threshing floors found in surveys and for pollen analysis of samples from a site near Quseima.¹⁰

This is supported by more recent studies that seem to indicate that the settlers even used fertilizers, never used by the desert nomads who practiced agriculture.¹¹

Thus, when we look at the settlement complex, we need to be thinking about a (partially?) self-sustaining enterprise in a previously unpopulated region. In other words, the sharp scholarly focus on the casemate sites, and their interpretation as forts, which brings up the specter of military preparation, tends to distract us from the full picture: Whoever moved there was not only (or necessarily) guarding an area but working it. The

¹⁰ Finkelstein has since changed his view, and in a 2008 article coauthored with Ruth Shahak-Gross, he argues that the evidence does not support characterizing these sites as agricultural. Nevertheless, this reconsideration has been roundly attacked. Notably, Finkelstein himself had previously brought evidence for agriculture, which he simply ignores now, and he also ignores additional evidence for agriculture, for fertilization of the terraces, and more. Furthermore, the idea that no agriculture was practiced in any of the Negev settlements would be difficult to accept since even pastoral nomads practice some dry farming, even without settling down. The idea that the Negev settlers would forgo agriculture and instead import cereals grown by sedentary communities somewhere else would be a pattern of behavior almost unheard of. Not only would the cost of transporting grain for dozens of miles overland be prohibitive, but why shouldn't they practice agriculture? Indeed, the absence of positive evidence to which Finkelstein and Shahak-Gross refer is based on tiny probes, insufficient for making such broad claims (see also Rosen 2017: 218–220).

¹¹ Bruins and van der Plicht 2007.

Negev Highlands casemate sites were not a series of military guard posts but frontier settlements.

This understanding, in turn, explains the concentration of the sites in the northwestern part of the Negev Highlands. This part of the Negev can sustain agriculture, as it receives more than 100 millimeters of rainwater per year. Granted, this amount of precipitation is not enough to make the area *attractive* for settlement or to make agricultural production a goal, but it is enough to allow for subsistence agriculture. In contrast, the southern part of the Negev Highlands and the Aravah east of the highlands – which we shall discuss later in this chapter – are far too dry and infertile for agrarian habitation. In short, the sites were built as part of a project to settle the northwestern Negev, but who wanted to settle this harsh region in the first place?

THE NEGEV HIGHLAND SITES AND THE HIGHLAND POLITY.

The settling of the Negev was not merely an expression of natural growth. This is not a case of people from nearby towns feeling crowded and moving to an adjacent area to start fresh. The area is simply too remote and arid to invite large-scale settlement, and the country to the north was far from being too densely populated.

Moreover, the appearance of sixty new fortified structures and hundreds of other features, all built in a relatively short time, seems too coordinated to happen by chance. Such an undertaking is too complex for diffuse groups of individuals with no central authority to accomplish in a relatively short period; such a process, uncoordinated by a central power, would have lasted centuries, and this is clearly not the case here. Instead, the settlement of the Negev Highlands was mostly a result of central, organized activity, even if most of the settlers were civilians (rather than soldiers). But which polity was it that decided to settle this area so aggressively, and why?

The northern pottery, which constitutes 60 percent of pottery at the sites, connects us with the settled lands to the north, but does not necessarily require that the north be responsible for the phenomenon, only that there were extensive contacts.¹² However, the formal LFS

¹² And the pottery does not in itself suggest with which region in the north the contacts were made.

houses found in some of the settlements, many of them nicely built and of the classical type, do point to the highland polity as the coordinating power. These structures were very common in Israelite sites and are usually completely missing – or at best rare – in other sites. Moreover, as we discussed in Excursus 6.1, these structures were used in the tenth century in territories that came under Israelite control or influence, likely as a way for Israelites to demonstrate their power.

The emerging highland kingdom appears to have been interested in populating the region and therefore built a system of fortified sites. The reasons for the kingdom's interests will be discussed at length later, but a few words are in order here: The roads that crossed the Negev and connected Arabia and the Aravah with the settled country in general and with the port cities of Gaza and Ashkelon in particular (and through them with the developing Mediterranean trade network) became important during this period.

Whoever controlled the roads – and this required control from the Beersheba–Arad Valley in the north to Kadesh Barnea in the south – could tax the caravans carrying lucrative commodities, like incense and copper. In order to prevent caravans from passing without paying, however, it was not enough to place a few large fortresses in strategic locations; given the size of the region many caravans could still go unnoticed.

As it would have been impractical to fill the area with hundreds, probably even thousands of soldiers, a system of more or less self-sustaining agriculturally fortified settlement was built. Thickly settling the area allowed the highland polity to make sure no caravan could pass without being noticed and without paying.

While the system as a whole was composed of many small, fortified settlements accompanied by hamlets and the like, some of the larger casemate settlements, especially the few located in strategic locations, would have served a military function.

Let us take the Aharoni Fortress as an example.¹³ Unlike many of the so-called fortresses, which can more accurately be described as fortified structures, the Aharoni Fortress is probably a real fortress. The site, located in the southernmost edge of the Negev settlement enterprise, is

¹³ Meshel 1994.

much larger than the average enclosure. It is perched upon a relatively high hilltop – some 140 meters above its immediate surroundings – with an excellent control over large areas. Some of its walls are freestanding and do not even form part of a casemate enclosure.

The finds unearthed in the site also highlight its unique nature. First, the site seems more firmly connected with the north than other sites. For example, in the Aharoni Fortress, wheel-made, northern pottery comprises some 90 percent of the ceramic assemblage, while handmade Negev Ware comprises only about 10 percent. In addition, remains of imported cedar were found, indicating the importance of the site and strong connections with the north. Another unusual feature of the site is that no sickle blades were unearthed, which suggests that, unlike most other Negev sites (where such finds are common), the inhabitants of the Aharoni Fortress did not practice agriculture. Apparently, they were receiving grain (cereal pollen was discovered) from nearby sites in the valley.

As an actual fortress, the Aharoni Fortress was likely built for defensive and administrative purposes, to keep eyes not only on caravans but also on the various sites' populations. The polity that built this fort therefore invested considerable resources in it. On the basis of various considerations, it appears as if central sites – perhaps also serving as real administrative centers or forts – existed in other locations as well, like the very large site of Rahba, located near the phenomenon's northern edge.

But who were the settlers, and why did they move to this harsh environment? In order to better understand their identity and nature, we need to turn to a discussion of the unique Negev Ware.

NEGEV WARE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SETTLEMENTS. We noted repeatedly that about 40 percent of the pottery found in most of the Negev settlements is a coarse, handmade pottery known as Negev Ware or Negbite pottery (Figure 25). Though the percentages vary across sites, this pottery constitutes a significant part of the assemblage in almost every site in the Negev. At the same time, this pottery is practically unknown in northern sites, and can hardly be found in contemporaneous sites in the nearby Beersheba–Arad Valley.

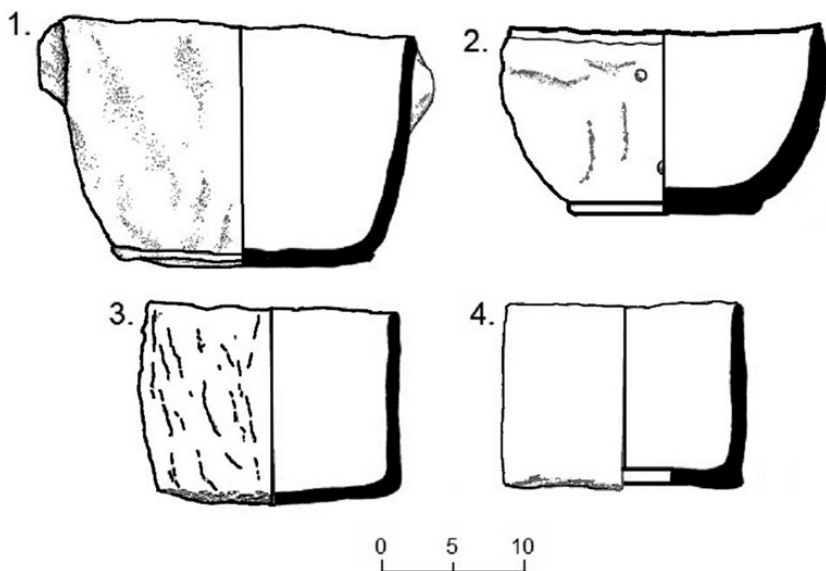


Figure 25 Sample of Negev Ware: 1. Horvat Rahba; 2. Metzudat Har Boqer; 3. Me'azad Nahal Zena; 4. Ramat Matred (redrawn after Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004: 137).

Ze'ev Meshel describes the pottery as follows: "[T]he so-called 'Negbite' pottery is unique in its forms, manufacturing technique, and distribution. It consists of crude, handmade vessels produced from coarse clay, tempered with grits and organic materials. The vessels are poorly fired and many have mat or textile impressions on the base."¹⁴ This, however, is not an entirely new style of pottery, and similar handmade vessels can be found, albeit in very low percentages, in southern sites from the Early Bronze Age (fourth millennium BCE) to the Islamic period (late first millennium CE).

In the past, some scholars suggested that this coarse pottery was produced by the desert nomads when they settled down, and we have seen that its mere presence has been used to suggest that the Negev sites were inhabited by nomads who were settling down in this period. This view, however, is problematic.

Notably, the initial connection between this pottery and the nomads was implicitly based on the commonsense assumption that only nomads

¹⁴ Meshel 2002: 283.

with no tradition in pottery manufacture could be responsible for the production of these coarse vessels. Not only isn't this assumption supported by any data, but it lacks internal consistency: If the pottery was indeed produced only when settling down, how was this tradition maintained when the nomads were not settled?

One way or the other, there is no need to posit invisible nomads with an oral tradition about pottery styles native to the Negev, when a similar kind of handmade pottery was produced continuously nearby, in various sites in southern Transjordan, in or near what came to be known as Edom. Although not so dominant even there, this region seems to be the area where the tradition of producing this style of handmade ware was practiced throughout history, and as we will see, this is probably whence the tradition was brought.

This, however, leads us to the next conundrum. Why would the settlers in the Negev Highlands suddenly begin to make massive use of this particular form of handmade pottery – more than was used in the Transjordanian sites – even, in some cases (as we shall see), importing it? It is especially odd given that most of the pottery in the area was typical northern pottery. Before answering this question, we need to understand what was happening in the area just east and south of the Negev Highlands, the Arava.

THE ARAVAH'S COPPER MINES

Copper was a very important metal in the ancient Near East, not least because it is the main ingredient in the production of bronze. Thus, domination of copper mines would be an economic boon for any polity.

Two massive copper veins can be found in the southern Levant.¹⁵ One is in the Transjordan, slightly southeast of the Dead Sea, in the region of Feinan. The enormous copper smelting site in this area, known as Khirbet en-Nahas (KEN; Arabic for "The Ruins of Copper"), was explored in 1934 by Nelson Glueck (1900–71), an American archaeologist, a rabbi, and even a spy who during the Second World War used archaeological cover to create an espionage network for the Office of

¹⁵ For the sites, see, for example, Gluck 1959; Rothenberg 1972; Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014; Ben-Yosef et al. 2012.

Strategic Services (OSS). Based on pottery that he found, Glueck dated the site to the tenth century BCE, declaring it to contain King Solomon's "real" mines (in contrast to the fanciful tale of south African gem mines, invented by H. Ridder Haggard in his best-selling 1885 adventure novel, *King Solomon's Mines*).

The other major copper vein can be found further south, in the Timna Valley, which is part of Israel's Arava region. Geologically speaking, both sites were once contiguous, and part of the same complex of copper veins, but the great (Syro-African) rift cut this site down the middle, separating the two parts on both an east-west and a north-south axis.

Nelson Glueck also explored Timna briefly and dated it to the same period. This dating was later disputed by Beno Rothenberg, who initially served as Glueck's photographer before becoming a leading expert in ancient metallurgy at the University College London. Rothenberg found evidence of Egyptian mining there, including a Hathor temple, and ended up redating the mining activity to the thirteenth century BCE.

But, as we have already seen in Chapter 3, it turns out that Glueck's dating was correct after all, at least partially. The current excavators of both copper-smelting sites – Thomas Levy and Mohammad Najjar at KEN and Erez Ben-Yosef at Timna – using modern excavation techniques and carbon dating, have demonstrated that, although beginning earlier, copper production at both sites peaked in the tenth century BCE.

Who was doing this mining? In the earlier, smaller smelting operations at Timna of the thirteenth century, we have evidence of Egyptian involvement, perhaps aided by North Arabians (often called Midianites), whom the Egyptians perhaps brought in to work the smelting for the mines.

From the twelfth century onward, however, we have no evidence of Egyptian presence. Instead, it seems that the copper mining and smelting was run by the local population who inhabited and later ruled the southern Transjordanian highlands that came to be called Edom.

The identification of miners and smelters as Edomites, strongly advocated by Levy and Ben-Yosef, is compelling. But while the growing activity is to be associated with the local population, two major transformations

took place in the Iron IIA, and both should be associated with the impact of external powers – the first with Israel’s highland polity in the early tenth century, and the second with Egypt in the later part of the century.

TENTH-CENTURY CONNECTION WITH THE ISRAELITE POLITY.

In the Feinan region, at KEN, a real fort was erected in the very beginning of Iron IIA, around which we find houses, some in the LFS tradition, which, as we’ve noted (Excursus 6.1), are closely associated in this formative period with the Israelite polity. The erection of the fort occurs at the very time that a significant increase in copper production took place, and it is clear that the two are connected.

While the growth in copper production was overall a gradual process, the erection of the fort and LFS houses in the tenth century was more sudden and suggests the involvement of outside forces. Although the workers were no doubt the same as before – that is, Edomite locals – it would be difficult to maintain that the changes that occurred in the tenth century were unrelated to the Israelite polity in the northwest.

The link to the north is even clearer at Timna. Erez Ben-Yosef’s detailed study shows that here too copper production peaked in the tenth century BCE and that a hill known as the Slaves’ Hill was fortified then for the first time. The hill was surrounded by a wall with a gate and had a path for donkeys. It housed elite craftsman to smelt the copper ore.

Thanks to the extremely arid climate of this southerly region, the preservation of ancient archaeological material is exceptional, and the dry climate of the Timna Valley has preserved daily life artifacts for three millennia. Indeed, near the gate, piles of donkey dung from 3,000 years ago were discovered, well preserved enough to be studied in the lab. These studies revealed that the donkeys were fed hay and grape pomace. Grapes do not grow in the Aravah, so the donkeys clearly ate a “northern” pomace.

The same expense was taken in supporting the people who worked on the Slaves’ Hill during this period, who were eating fruits, olives, and grains imported from the north. Unlike the part of the Negev Highlands discussed earlier, which was dotted with casemate structures and homesteads supporting themselves with farming, the Aravah is too arid to sustain agriculture even at the subsistence level. Thus, any fruit, grain, olive, or root, must have been imported from the north.

Moreover, the Timna smelters were also receiving imported fish. Notably, although the Timna Valley is much closer to the Red Sea than the Mediterranean, the fish they ate were Mediterranean fish. Pieces of textile from the smelters' clothing found by the excavators show that some of them wore high-end, dyed wool and other forms of elite dress. All this shows that imports were coming in consistently from the north to support this elite class of smelters at a rather high standard of living in a guarded, fortified settlement. All these changes in Timna coincide with the ones at Feinan and imply a sort of takeover of the operation by the highland polity.

The connection between Timna, Feinan, the Negev settlements, and the north is expressed in additional ways. Analysis of the clay of some Negev Ware vessels unearthed in the Negev Highlands shows that a large percentage of this pottery included copper micro-slugs, suggesting they were brought there from the Arava mines.¹⁶ Some scholars attempted to explain this by suggesting that the Negev Highland sites served as a hinterland of the mines and as a place where the miners could stay during the hot summers.¹⁷ While this is likely true, the location of the Negev Highland sites and the finds within them only make sense if the mines were controlled, partially at least, by the northern polity:

If the Edomites had been in control, they would have built their settlements in the Edom highlands, which are much closer to Timna than the Negev Highlands and are also much better ecologically, boasting a Mediterranean climate. The mere fact that the hinterland of the mines was in the Negev Highlands suggests that the settlements and by extension the mines were at this time controlled by a polity to the north.

One can debate the nature of the Israelite takeover and how this control was expressed (more later in this chapter), but the overall material evidence clearly shows intensive connections with the north, and especially with Israel, suggesting at least some form of control by the latter.

The system is supplemented by another link at 'En Hazeva. While known especially for its later Iron Age fort, the earliest phase at the 'En

¹⁶ For the micro-slugs, see Martin and Finkelstein 2013.

¹⁷ Compare Ben-Yosef 2021:164n9.

Hazeva is dated to the tenth century, when it served to bridge the distance between the Feinan area and the Negev Highland sites, guarding the road between them (the site is commonly identified with biblical Tamar, and see Chapter 15).¹⁸

EGYPTIAN IMPACT IN THE LATE TENTH CENTURY. While these changes took place in the early tenth century, at the very beginning of the Iron II, a second transformation took place in the late tenth century. Instead of many small smelting operations in various places, smelting was now carried out in a few larger centers. This change in technology has been attributed to the Egyptian takeover of the smelting operations under Pharaoh Shishak, who led a military campaign in the region. Indeed, taking control of the lucrative copper smelting may have been one of his main goals.

THE ARAVAH IN THE TENTH CENTURY: A SUMMARY. We have a clear, circumscribed period, covering much of the tenth century, during which this Edomite copper region was connected with a northern polity within the Land of Israel. That this was the highland polity is based on both direct evidence (LFS houses) and indirect evidence (Israel being the only polity growing at the time, as Philistia was in great decline).

COMBINING THE CONUNDRUMS TO PAINT A PICTURE

Broadly speaking, we have now run through three ostensibly separate problems in this chapter:

- a. What happened to the large Iron I settlement of Tel Masos and the other, smaller settlements in the Beersheba Valley (other than Beersheba) and where did the population go at the turn of the Iron II?
- b. Who built the Negev settlements, why, and whence did the actual settlers come? Why did these settlers make such extensive use of unique, handmade Negev Ware?

¹⁸ For example, Cohen and Yisrael 1996; see also Schniedewind 2010.

- c. Why do we see clear evidence for fortifications in the Arava copper mines in the tenth century BCE, and why is there such a strong connection between the mines and the north specifically at this time?

In theory, it would be possible to answer each of these questions individually, and many have tried. Nevertheless, we would argue that looking at all three phenomena together suggests yet again one very specific answer: the nascent kingdom of Israel. What follows is the story as best we can reconstruct it.

ISRAEL EXPANDS SOUTHWARD

Below the Judean hills, north of the Negev Highlands, sits the Beersheba Valley. After being devoid of permanent settlements in the Late Bronze Age, settlement developed and expanded during the Iron I. The ethnic affiliation of the settlers is unclear, and it is likely that it included members of various groups, with diverse affiliations, which probably also shifted according to the circumstances.

The largest settlement, Tel Masos, shows evidence of cultural connection with several groups that operated in the region, perhaps even Egypt. However one defines the identity of the settlers, most of them were clearly not Israelites, as the finds reveal a sharp boundary with the nearby highlands.

As the late Iron I highland villages solidified into a polity and sought to strengthen their position vis-à-vis other groups, this meant, in practical terms, incorporating friends and expanding at the expense of enemies. This expansion, which likely bore a martial character, would have been the precipitant cause of the disappearance of Tel Masos and its satellites, the main settlements in the Beersheba Valley.

At the same time, the small village of Beersheba was spared, rebuilt as a larger settlement, and after a few generations even turned into a fortified town.¹⁹ Beersheba's different fate has all the appearance of a political alliance. Either the Beersheba villagers were in league with the Israelites the whole time, or they saw which way the wind was blowing and made an

¹⁹ The situation in the region will be further discussed in Chapter 15.

alliance before it was too late. Either way, Beersheba was integrated into the new highland polity while its neighbors were removed.

But where did the people of these destroyed or abandoned settlements go? Although some were probably killed and others might have fled, this is unlikely to be the fate of all or even most. The main answer to the question is apparent when we look further south.

Shortly after the transformation of the Beersheba Valley, the main phase of settlement of the Negev Highlands began. As noted, this enterprise was organized by a local power, and only the emerging Israelite highland polity fits this bill.

First, no other reasonable candidate for initiating this settlement presents itself. Philistia, as we have seen, was in decline. The small pockets of southern Canaanite villages in the Shephelah were in the midst of joining Israel and, in any event, would have been too small for such an operation. While it is tempting to associate the Negev Highland sites with Edom, this is unlikely. Not only was this polity tiny, but Edom itself was being transformed at this time and came under some form of foreign domination, as we shall see in more detail. The Israelites are, therefore, the only real contenders for initiating the settlement in the Negev Highlands.

But it is not only the lack of other candidates that favors Israel; the presence of LFS houses clearly points toward the nascent highland polity. These houses are not to be found in Philistine or Canaanite settlements, but they mark Israelite expansion (see especially Excursus 6.1).

While Israel may have initiated the settlement in the Negev Highlands, the settlers were not all Israelites. The markers of Israeliteness are stronger in certain areas than in others, and they are most clearly evident in the few large structures, built in the LFS plan and often interpreted as governors' residencies. In other words, Israelites were there as governors or representatives of the kingdom (and a few others might have joined for other reasons).

Other than these Israelite elites, who else lived there? We suggest that Israel forcibly moved conquered peoples there.²⁰ As we noted, the Negev

²⁰ See already Faust 2006c, and see also Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004: 156; Halpern 2001: 355, 463.

Highlands are fertile enough for subsistence agriculture, but no agrarian group would leave the settled country to the north to set up farming in the arid Negev Highlands unless they were forced to.

Which conquered people would have been brought there? The first and most obvious candidates would be the former inhabitants of the Beersheba Valley towns such as Tel Masos, whose settlements had been destroyed or abandoned under duress. But this is almost certainly not the whole picture.

Another likely group is the former inhabitants of the Canaanite villages that were part of the Philistine orbit in the Iron I (Chapter 6). Not only did the massive Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Ekron shrink, but the (mostly Canaanite) small towns as well as the villages and the Haserim in the Negev practically disappeared.

This large-scale abandonment appears to reflect a significant reorientation by the Canaanite inhabitants of the area. These local Canaanites, over whom the Philistines had been ruling for more than a century, left their villages. Perhaps some were drawn to the new option of Negev settlements opened by the geopolitical changes, or more likely, perhaps some were coerced to do so by an aggressive, expanding Israelite polity. But even this does not exhaust the question of where the Negev settlers came from.

One important piece of evidence points to a third pool of settlers forced or pressured to settle the Negev. As we noted, the only area where handmade pottery similar to Negev Ware was produced in all periods, even if rarely, is in the vicinity of Edom. While the coarse, handmade pottery is far more dominant in the Negev settlements than in Edom, the style likely originated in Edom. If so, it stands to reason that among the settlers of the Negev Highlands were also people from the vicinity of northern Edom (or southern Moab) over which the new polity took control, and that these peoples brought this style of pottery with them to the new sites.

But why was this style adopted en masse by the new settlers? What made it so popular here and now? To understand why this trend “went viral,” we need to look carefully at the style.

On a practical level, coarse, handmade pottery was certainly easy to make for poor workers living under a foreign power’s domination. Nevertheless, this is not a sufficient explanation. First, in no other period

did the Negev's harsh conditions lead to the en masse adoption of this style. Second, we have seen that the inclusion of copper micro-slugs in their clay indicates that some of the pottery was actually *imported* from the Aravah.

We suggest that the reason this style was adopted en masse lies in its contrast with the northern-style pottery. As we discussed in Chapter 5, the Iron IIA style that developed as a result of the evolving complexity in the north, and that came to symbolize the new political and social order, is:

- a. Wheel-made.
- b. Relatively standardized – that is, with little regional variation.
- c. Variegated – that is, utilized a wide variety of forms.
- d. Treated, as many serving vessels (bowls, jugs, and juglets) were slipped and burnished.

In contrast, the coarse Negbite pottery is:

- a. Handmade.
- b. Not uniform.
- c. Limited in repertoire.
- d. Untreated with any slip or burnish.

This stark difference seems hardly coincidental. Instead, we suggest that the popularity of the Negev Ware style derives from this very stark contrast. If the northern pottery symbolized the new, northern social order, then the ruled peoples adopted a pottery style that would express their opposition to their Israelite overlords, who were forcing them to settle the Negev and to live in these harsh conditions.

If, as seen in Chapter 5, the northern pottery embodied the emerging social hierarchy and the implicit ideology associated with it, its use by conquered peoples could have triggered the feeling of submission to the oppressors. Indeed, suppressed groups often avoid material items if they feel that they naturalize and justify their lower position.²¹

A well-known example is the colonoware of the southern United States, which consists of coarse, handmade pottery vessels. Colonoware vessels were found in many sites in South Carolina and nearby regions,

²¹ Compare Levy 1998; Shackel 2000.

mainly on slave plantations, where they comprised about 70 percent of the assemblage. According to various scholars, the material culture of Anglo-America at this time was highly charged with ideological messages that justified the hierarchical social order.

Leland Ferguson, a professor of anthropology at the University of South Carolina who studies slave plantations, notes that if the slaves “recognized and accepted their place in the obvious order, they would serve without resistance, with some saying they would receive a more equitable reward in another realm – heaven.” Colonoware vessels, he suggests, were used by the slaves, even though these same slaves were supplied with European pottery by the owners. Their choice to use colonoware instead was part of their resistance to the social order.²²

The situation in the Negev Highlands appears to have been similar. The inhabitants in the Negev sites used the coarse, handmade Negev ware because it was so different from the pottery that came to symbolize the nascent northern polity – the system that settled them there. For this, they adopted a style that, while familiar to some of them, was the diametric opposite of the northern pottery, and made massive use of it. This was most likely the beginning of a process in which some of the population in the Negev sites formed a shared identity, though the process was cut short and never had the chance to mature (see discussion of the tribe of Simeon in Chapter 15).

This also explains why, in actual fortresses such as the Aharoni Fortress, very little Negev Ware was found. The coarse, Negbite pottery was a style popular among the dominated people, in symbolic protest against their overlords and the dominant group. Fewer such people would have lived in the fortress, whose inhabitants were mainly military and administrative personnel, most of whom would likely be Israelites themselves or closely associated with them. But why did Israel force these peoples to live in the Negev?

DOMINATING AN IMPORTANT ROUTE AND INDUSTRY. One answer is that Israel wished to dominate the spice route. Already in this period, a lucrative trade in spices, coming from the Arabian Peninsula

²² Ferguson 1991: 30–31.

and heading to the Mediterranean coast, was blooming. In addition to purchasers in Egypt, the Arabian spice merchants could expect to do business via Philistine ports with the Phoenicians, whose trade routes took them all the way around the Mediterranean, including such faraway places as Greece and Spain.

Anyone who could dominate the Negev could ensure the payment of a tax in exchange for permission to cross through territory. In order to control the area, one needed, in addition to the Beersheba Valley, to control a strip of the Negev Highlands, stretching all the way to Kadesh Barnea. South of Kadesh Barnea the conditions are too harsh, and caravans cannot easily cross. Control of the highlands between Dimona and Kadesh Barnea secured taxes from anyone who crossed the area. And the best way to dominate an area is to fill it with settlements, controlled by a handful of central administrative sites, with local governors and military personnel.

But an even stronger reason for this creation of a Negev frontier has to do with the Aravah copper mines. Domination over the copper mines would not have been just another territorial expansion on Israel's part, nor would it have been a mere easy way to collect a little extra tax revenue from a dominated people.

As noted, copper was a very important resource. During the Iron I, mining and smelting took place under the aegis of the local Edomite chieftains. The demand grew with time, peaking in the tenth century, when Phoenician trade apparently brought Edomite copper to remote areas. Once a new, centralized, and more powerful polity emerged in the north, it wanted its share of the lucrative commodity.

The expansion of the highland polity led to skirmishes with peoples in the vicinity of Edom, who were apparently defeated by the Israelites, leading to some of the locals being transferred to the Negev Highlands. It may very well be that the highland polity did not physically conquer the area of the mines, but that the Edomites who operated them became clients of the new polity. The latter was responsible for constructing the forts, the LFS houses, and for the tight connections with the north, expressed for example by the monopoly of northern products, such as Mediterranean fish, in Timna.

The mining was most likely still conducted by the Edomites, and the Israelite control may have been (partly) indirect since Edomite cooperation would have been key. Israel benefited greatly from this arrangement, which

is one reason it invested so heavily in the settlement enterprise in the Negev Highland sites, which not only secured the duties, but also served as a hinterland of sorts to the mining and smelting sites in the Aravah.

Caravans passed through the Negev Highlands, bringing food and other commodities to the mines in the south and returning with copper to the north. If needed, the Israelite Negev settlements would have supplied the caravans with food and security. These sites probably also supplied some of the workers in the winter months and hosted them during the summer season, when mining would have ceased due to the extreme heat. This shows that the Israelites had some control over the Aravah at the time: if the mines were controlled exclusively by the Edomites, the miners would have spent their summers in the highlands of Edom, which were much nearer to the mines and had a much better climate.

Control, even if indirect, over copper production would have been an enormous boon for the nascent kingdom of Israel, increasing its reach and economic power many times. And the control over the Negev also secured the cooperation of the Edomites, since it meant that Israel controlled the trade routes without which the mines were profitless.

POSTSCRIPT: A SHORT-LIVED FRONTIER

This Negev settlement enterprise was short-lived, as was Israel's (indirect?) control over the copper industry. Within not much more than half a century, the entire Negev frontier was ravaged by Pharaoh Shishak/Shoshenq I's southern campaign, who lists dozens of sites in the Negev in his description of destroyed enemy territory. Although not all the sites were destroyed, and at least some continued into the ninth century, many settlements were probably damaged, and the system as a whole crumbled.

The division of the highland polity into Israel in the north and Judah in the south meant that neither was powerful enough to recover the settlements and the Egyptians established their rule over the region. We can see the change from Israelite to Egyptian hegemony expressed also in the second transformation the Aravah mines experienced toward the end of the tenth century, with a policy of centralized as opposed to diffuse production centers.

CHAPTER 10

Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Gilead

A Brief Overview of the Transjordan

THE RIDDLE: IN THE VERY BEGINNING of the Iron IIA, much of the Transjordan north of Edom experienced a wave of settlement abandonment. One exception to this pattern is the region of the Gilead, which experienced settlement growth. How are we to understand these two conflicting trends and their relationship with each other?

The Transjordan can be divided into a number of different sections inhabited and ruled by different polities. Some of these areas remained consistently affiliated with one group or another during the Iron Age II, while others changed hands multiple times (Figure 26).¹

EDOM

In the south, we have the land below Wadi al-Hasa, which flows into the Dead Sea near its southern point. This land is generally identified with Edom.

In the previous chapter, we touched upon this region, noting that although it developed independently in the Iron I, as a consequence of its flourishing copper mines, in the tenth century (Iron IIA), it appears to have been associated with – or dominated by – the Israelite polity in the northwest. This was indicated by the construction of an LFS house in Feinan, along with the sudden appearance of fortifications there and at Timna, and was supported by additional evidence from the Aravah sites and from the Negev Highlands.

¹ The basic idea behind this chapter was presented briefly in Faust 2021b: 25–26, with many references.

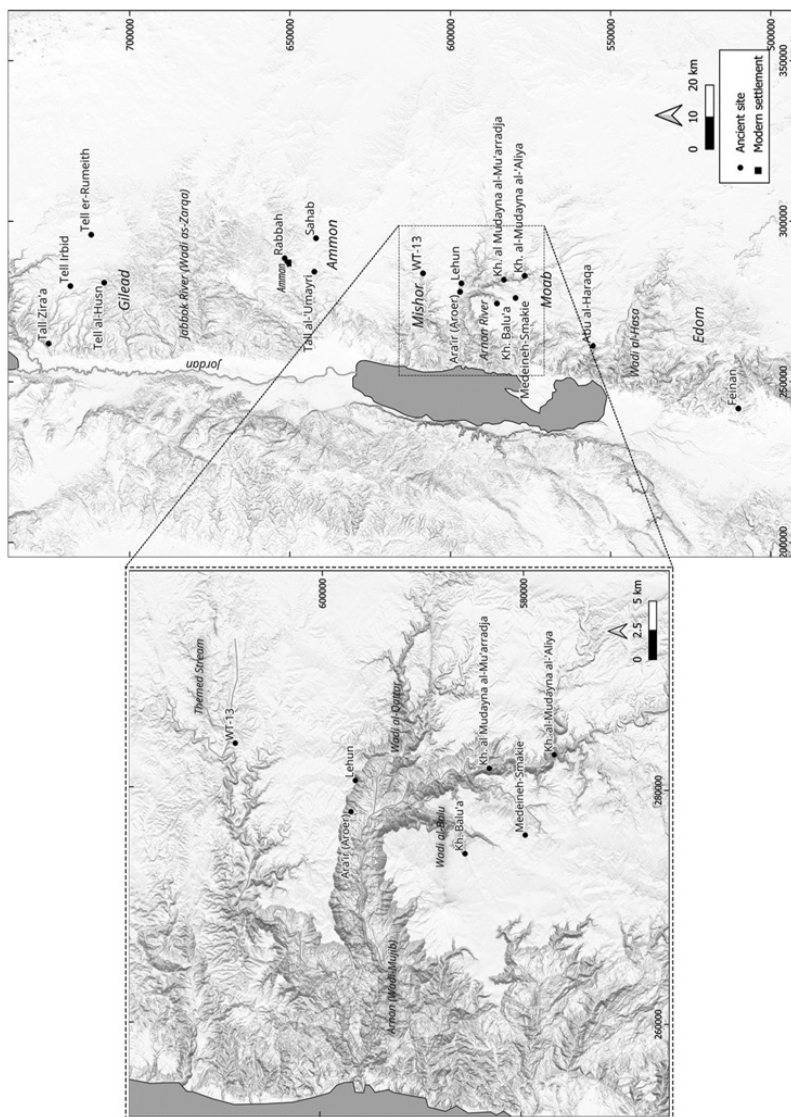


Figure 26 Map of Transjordan with main sites mentioned in the text (base map: Esri, USGS, Airbus DS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community).

The region experienced additional changes in the later part of the tenth century, and activity largely ceased during the ninth century.

MOAB

As we continue north, we come to the land between Wadi al-Hasa and Wadi Mujib (biblical Arnon), traditionally associated with the Moabites. A number of settlements were abandoned in this area in the beginning of the Iron IIA, specifically, Khirbet Balu'a, a relatively large settlement that sat at the mouth of Arnon's western tributary (Wadi al-Balu), as well as Khirbet al-Mudayna al-'Aliya and Khirbet al Mudayna al-Mu'arradja, both of which sit on the eastern tributary of the Arnon. Abu al-Haraq and Medeineh-Smakie were also abandoned at the time. The abandonment of these Moabite sites should be dated to the Iron I–Iron II transition, mainly to the very beginning of the Iron IIA around the middle of the tenth century.²

THE MISHOR: A CONTESTED LAND

North of the Arnon River is an area the Bible calls the Mishor, meaning the flatlands, since, while it is located on the top of an elevated area, it is more or less flat. The area extends north to the area of the Wadi Hesbon. Politically and ethnically speaking, the Mishor, or at least different parts of it, changed hands between Moabites, Israelites, and Ammonites, and perhaps other, smaller groups lost to history.

Archaeologically speaking, we know very little about this area during the Iron IIA. What we do know, however, fits with the pattern we saw in Moab, namely abandonment. The city of Ara'ir (biblical Aroer), just north of the Arnon River, and Lehun, slightly east of Ara'ir, just north of Wadi al-Qattar, the Arnon's eastern tributary, were abandoned in this period. Also, just south of the Themed Stream, a site known as WT-13 shows signs of abandonment in the early phase of this period.³

² Homès-Fredericq 2000: 194; Routledge 2004: 93, table 5.1, 106–108; Routledge et al. 2014; Daviau 2017: 39; Steiner 2017: 173. See also Routledge et al. 2014: 103–105, contra Finkelstein and Lipschits 2011.

³ For most sites, see the references in the previous footnote. As for WT-13, we are referring to the early phase.

AMMON

North and west of the Mishor was the land of the Ammonites with its capital in Rabbah, modern-day Amman. Its northern border was on the (eastern) Jabbok River, but how far south it extended on its eastern side is unclear. (It is likely that the actual borders of all of these polities were constantly in flux.)

Craig Tyson notes that here too evidence points to abandonment of Iron I sites in the Iron IIA. Tall Safut, about seven miles northwest of Amman, was settled in the Bronze and Iron I, shows significant expansion in the Iron IIB, but reveals no remains from the Iron IIA. The same holds true for Tall al-‘Umayri, southwest of Amman, and Sahab, southeast of Amman. After illustrating the fate of the Iron I settlements in the region, Tyson notes: “Interpretation of the remains from the Iron Age IIA on the Amman Plateau must remain tentative because of the lack of significant, well-stratified finds.”⁴

The most notable exception is the Amman citadel, located in the ancient (and modern) capital, which was partly fortified at this time. Tyson notes that “cooperative efforts to build defensive walls and possibly a large water system suggest intrasite organization,” adding that this is “without providing significant evidence for intersite hierarchy.”

In other words, while ancient Rabbah itself shows evidence of political organization and social complexity, no evidence points to this site dominating a significant polity because the hinterland was sparsely populated at best. What seems to have occurred is that the local population abandoned many small sites and concentrated in larger ones. Rabbah is an excavated example, but others will probably be discovered in the future. Consequently, while it is possible that the city ruled over a few other sites, the overall number of sites declined.

In sum, the general picture that emerges from most parts of Transjordan, from north of Wadi al-Hasa in Moab, to the Mishor and Ammon, up to the Jabbok River in the north, is one of settlement abandonment. Benjamin Porter summarized: “Current evidence suggests that most Iron I settlement of western Jordan dissipated during the mid-tenth century.”⁵

⁴ Tyson 2014. The quote is from page 26.

⁵ Porter 2019: 328. See also Herr and Najjar 2008: 319; Herr 2012: 218–219; Tyson 2014: 27.

GILEAD

The next area, with its southern border on the Jabbok River and its northern border at the Yarmok River, presents a different story. This is the area that the Bible calls the Gilead and it was mostly Israelite, though in the later periods, the Aramean state of Damascus sometimes held sway over the area.

While only a handful of excavations have been conducted, the little we do know points to an increase in settlement as opposed to a decrease. For example, Tell er-Rumeith was first settled at some point in the latter half of the tenth century (Stratum VIII). The site was small, only about a tenth of a hectare in size. Nevertheless, it was well fortified by a one-meter-thick, mud-brick wall.⁶ The fortified site sat on the Kings Highway, connecting Rabbah of the Ammonites with Damascus, and is generally identified as the biblical Ramot Gilead.

At Tall Zira'a, near Gadara, a small village existed already in the Iron Age I, but in the early Iron II, a much larger settlement developed boasting a city wall and what the excavators identified as administrative buildings. Part of this city was destroyed or damaged, according to the excavators, at around 900 BCE, but it continued to thrive.⁷

Another example, only a few miles west of Tell er-Rumeith, is Tell al-Husn. This site shows continuity from the Iron I to the Iron II, and its fortifications seem to have been built in the early part of the Iron II. A fourth example, a few kilometers north of Tell al-Husn, is the central site of Tell Irbid inside the modern city of Irbid. In Hellenistic times, the town went by the name of Arabella, and, until the Muslim conquest, it was famous for its wines. Like Tell al-Husn, this site exhibits continuity from the Iron I to the Iron II.⁸

Admittedly, the information available for this area is partial. Nevertheless, it seems significant that, in contrast to what we find in Ammon, Moab, and the Mishor, here not only do we lack evidence of settlement abandonment, but the opposite: The Gilead shows evidence of settlement expansion, including the construction of fortified sites.

⁶ Barako 2015b: 189–191; also see Barako 2015a: 8. ⁷ Vieweger and Haser 2007: 159.

⁸ For both Tell al-Husn and Tell Irbid, see, for example, Herr and Najjar 2008: 319.

AGGRESSIVE ISRAEL

How are we to make sense of the various trends in the Transjordan? The same answer we offered in previous chapters about changes in settlement patterns and processes of abandonment is applicable here as well.

Edom, discussed in the previous chapter, was clearly within the Israelite polity's sphere of influence, and this explains the growth in connections of this area with the north, the fortifications, and the formal LFS houses at Feinan.

But how do we understand what happened in the other regions of the Transjordan, specifically those of Moab, the Mishor, and Ammon? These areas offer much evidence for abandonment in the early Iron IIA, sometimes (as in Ammon) accompanied with evidence for the concentration of the population in central sites.

What processes were behind such a pattern? We have seen in previous chapters that such an abandonment is likely to be a result either of (1) security problems – confrontations between groups – most likely created by incursions, leading to the abandonment of small sites as the population sought refuge elsewhere, or (2) the intentional policy of a state settling people elsewhere.

In this case, as in so many other cases discussed elsewhere in the book, the abandonment was a result of security problems, and the pattern is highly reminiscent of what we discussed in the opening chapters of Part II of the book. Initially, we noted the major wave of village abandonment in the Cisjordanian highlands in the late Iron I, which we explained as a consequence of Philistine incursions into Israelite territory. We also noted that slightly later, in the early Iron II – the very period we are discussing in this chapter – we find settlement abandonment in the Philistine territory as well as in the Beersheba Valley and – as we shall later see – also farther north. We explained these later abandonments as resulting from Israelite aggression subsequent to the formation of the monarchy and its expansion.

What occurred in Moab and Ammon in this period is probably due to the same factor: Israelite power. As Israel grew in strength, incursions into its neighboring territories became a tremendous threat to the

Moabites and Ammonites. Small villages and towns were no longer safe and thus were abandoned.

Whether the locals were killed, joined the Israelites, or escaped to safer, more central sites, we do not know as our knowledge of Transjordanian archaeology is limited (but it is likely that some people were transferred to the Negev highlands). In Ammon, at least, we have evidence for the appearance of social complexity, and it is likely that this was a result of these conflicts, which drove people into central and better-defended sites.

Why, then, did this abandonment not affect the Gilead region in the north? The answer is simple. The Gileadites were – or became – part of Israel. Whether they had always considered themselves closer to the Israelites than other groups in the Transjordan, or whether they simply welcomed the identity when the Israelites showed up is unclear.

Certainly, on a cultural level, the settlers of the Gilead region were quite similar to the settlers of the Samaritan and Judean highlands, such that it would not have been difficult to assume the Israelite mantle when called upon to do so. The collective memory preserved in the Bible at least acknowledges this affinity.

Here too we can see a parallel phenomenon in the Beersheba Valley since the village of Beersheba itself, unlike the other settlements, remained intact and eventually expanded and became fortified. We do not know why this site was treated so differently than the others, but it seems likely that, just as occurred in Gilead and elsewhere, this group either identified with the Israelites or at least decided that it would be in its best interests to start identifying with them at this point.

In sum, when the new polity expanded into territories inhabited by Israelite groups or groups that wished to become Israelite, the expansion of the new polity didn't damage their sites. In the case of the Gilead, given the preponderance of Israelite-like sites in the region, the area became an integral part of the polity (in contrast to most regions in central Transjordan). Thus it continued and flourished, with fortifications built in certain spots to solidify Israel's hold on the area against outside groups such as the Ammonites.

EXCURSUS 10.1 ISRAELITES OR NOT? THE HIGHLAND POLITY AND THE CHANGING FACES OF IDENTITY

In the book, we mention many ethnic groups. In several chapters, we contrasted – it is always a contrast – Israelites and Philistines, but many other groups were active at the time. What are these identities, and how can we study them?

Identity is subjective. We all have many identities related to various aspects of our life. Gender identity is one example; another is kinship affiliation. Our surname is generally an expression of this affinity. We also have religious identities, national identities, and many others. We tend to play between these identities, stressing one at the expense of the other according to the circumstances. Sometimes our religious identity will be at the fore; in other cases, our national identity will become the most important.⁹ People and even groups can also change their identities through official conversion, assimilation, and so forth.

In most cases, we stress identities that serve us in a given context; we define ourselves against something or someone else. We negotiate our differences and maintain boundaries with other peoples and groups. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes, “It is through contact with others that we discover who we are.”¹⁰ Understanding the other is therefore essential to decipher identities.

Ethnicity is one form of group identity. It is subjective and cannot be easily measured by objective criteria. In the oft-quoted words of Fredrick Barth – a Norwegian anthropologist whose work revolutionized our understanding of ethnicity – the bottom line amounts to “self-ascription and ascription by other.”¹¹

The Iron Age I was a formative period in which many groups crystallized, and the ethnic negotiations that ensued continued into the Iron IIA and afterward.

⁹ For broader discussions of ethnicity (and its material manifestations), see Emberling 1997; Faust 2006a, 2019c; Eriksen 2010, 2013.

¹⁰ Eriksen 2015: 331. ¹¹ Barth 1969: 11, 13.

We know how the Israelites viewed the ethnic map of the Iron Age II, with the various genealogical lists (and sometimes stories) naming peoples and the relations between them. Although the specific lists we have were penned by the Judahite elites, their overall picture of the world likely reflects that of a larger segment of the population.

It is important to understand how genealogical lists worked in ancient times. Unlike today, when genealogical lists attempt to be accurate reflections of family history, for traditional societies lists are active, and they are in constant flux, according to the circumstances. When two families need it, changes can be made to show that they are related.¹²

This does not mean that everything is possible, however. Changes are limited, and the lists cannot be completely rewritten, nor can they be transformed overnight, but adjustments were possible and even normal. The ability to adjust genealogies slowed down and eventually ceased once the lists became part of authoritative or canonical writings. Hence the lists we have in the Bible froze at some point, most likely during the Iron II. Even if these lists went through later editing in the Persian period or beyond, this would not have greatly changed their overall structure.

The lists show how the Israelites (or the Judahite elites) perceived their relations with the other groups when they were written down: some groups – those who at this time were regarded as Israelites – were seen as brothers or half brothers, and these became part of what eventually developed as the twelve tribes of Israel. Other groups – not Israelites but perceived as close – were described as first cousins (Edomites), second cousins (Ishmaelites, Midianites, etc.), or even third cousins (Moabites and Ammonites), and so forth. And some were not related at all (Canaanites, Philistines, Egyptians, etc.). The lists were meant to explain the relations between the groups to the audience.

Of course, the lists we have do not reflect the situation in the Iron I, when many groups were formed. While it is clear that an ethnic group

¹² For example, Scott 2009: 173, 176, 226–234, 265–270. See also Halpern 2001: 274.

by the name of Israel existed already in the late thirteenth century BCE, as it is referenced in an Egyptian inscription from Pharaoh Merenptah, this does not mean that said group consisted of the twelve tribes of Israel as listed in the Bible. It is more likely that Israel was made up of only some of the tribes that eventually made up this list, whereas others were separate but regarded as close to it, and still others were formed only later.

In fact, whether a group considered itself Israelite was likely initially fluid. All the groups that regarded themselves as Israelites had additional “tribal” identities, and these could have been stressed at the expense of the broader, Israelite one when the circumstances required it, enabling different associations and alliances. Thus, a given peripheral group could have emphasized or deemphasized the broad, Israelite meta-identity depending on the occasion.

Sometimes being an Israelite may have been important, but in many other instances it may not have been, especially in comparison with other identities that were more useful in daily interactions among groups, all of whose members were also Israelites. Moreover, groups that belonged to “Israel” could even fight each other. This should not surprise us. An endless number of ethnographic examples testify to this, and the Bible even tells such stories, such as the war between Ephraim and Manasseh in Judges 11. In short, there was flexibility at the time – some peripheral groups could join Israel, and others could leave it.

This is not the place for a lengthy discussion, but it seems that the Israelite meta-identity (formed in the late thirteenth century) was downplayed during much of the twelfth and early eleventh centuries, as the highland population was relatively isolated. With the lack of a significant “other,” the local groups stressed their tribal identities, which was essential for defining themselves in relations to the peer groups with whom they interacted. The broad identity was of less importance since they interacted only with Israelites.¹³

¹³ See Faust 2006a; forthcoming b, for a detailed reconstruction and many references.

As the eleventh century advanced, however, the highland groups were drawn into contact with the Philistines (and probably other groups). This interaction was clearly a benchmark, and with such a powerful “other,” the collective Israelite identity was inevitably highlighted at the expense of more local identities, which were relegated to a minor role in the population’s self-identity. Various markers were used to highlight the differences with this powerful “other,” like the avoidance of pork, the use of simple, undecorated pottery, the stress on circumcision as an ethnic marker, and more (see Chapters 4, 7, and 15). In short, finding themselves in conflict with the encroaching Philistines, the highlanders emphasized their joint Israelite identity.

Between these warring communities battling for hegemony were various local (Canaanite) groups. Some shifted their identities and alliances already in the course of the Iron I, but Canaanite communities continued to exist in most parts of the country at this time. Still, given the tensions and hostile relations that accompanied the end of the Iron I, people had to be clear as to who they were and with which side they affiliated at any given time. This resulted in many local groups assimilating into other groups and adopting their identities.

Notably, much of this stress and hostility did not exist in Transjordan at the time, as it was farther away from Philistia and the Philistine incursions into the highlands. Hence identities remained easier to manipulate. People knew who they were at any given time, but it was easier to maintain some ambiguity and eventually to change sides. The far north (an area that will be discussed in Chapter 12) was also like the Transjordan – there was less large-scale hostility, and hence more ambiguity could be maintained.

This changed once the highland polity started to expand into these territories, and, as a consequence, people there had to choose (and we will see a somewhat similar process taking place in the Galilee). Groups formerly affiliated with the Israelites, however loosely, could easily join in and benefit from the success of their “brothers.” This is apparently what happened in various regions like the Beersheba Valley, the Gilead,

and, as we shall see, the Galilee. Some groups became Israelites, even if before that their connections were loose or perhaps did not even exist. Other groups, by contrast, were forced to create their own identities, leading to the formation of the better defined ethnic identities we are familiar with in Iron II Transjordan, like the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites.

CHAPTER 11

The Cities and Villages of the Northern Valleys

THE RIDDLE: MOST OF THE CITIES IN THE JEZREEL, Beth-Shean, and adjacent valleys, which flourished in the Iron I, were destroyed in the beginning of the Iron IIA. Some were then rebuilt along very different lines. At the same time, in contrast to the large-scale village abandonment occurring throughout the land, some farming villages continued and others were even established. What happened to the cities, and what connection might there be to the villages' continued existence?

THE JEZREEL AND BETH-SHEAN VALLEYS: AN OVERVIEW

The Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys have long been a region of great strategic importance (Figure 27).¹ This string of valleys, which includes also the smaller Harod Valley that connects them, cuts through the central highlands ridge, separating the Galilee from Samaria.

These valleys served as the east–west corridor between the regions of Syria and the Transjordan in the east and the Mediterranean coast in the west, and hosted part of the international highway that connected Egypt and Mesopotamia. Because of their strategic importance, the Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys have been the site of many important battles throughout history, including the battle of Megiddo (fifteenth century BCE), when Pharaoh Thutmose III defeated a coalition of Canaanite city-states; the battle of Hattin (1187 CE), when the Ayyubid sultan, Salah ad-Din

¹ The basic idea presented here is briefly outlined in Faust 2021b: 26–27, with references; for many other sites, see Gyllenberg 2019.

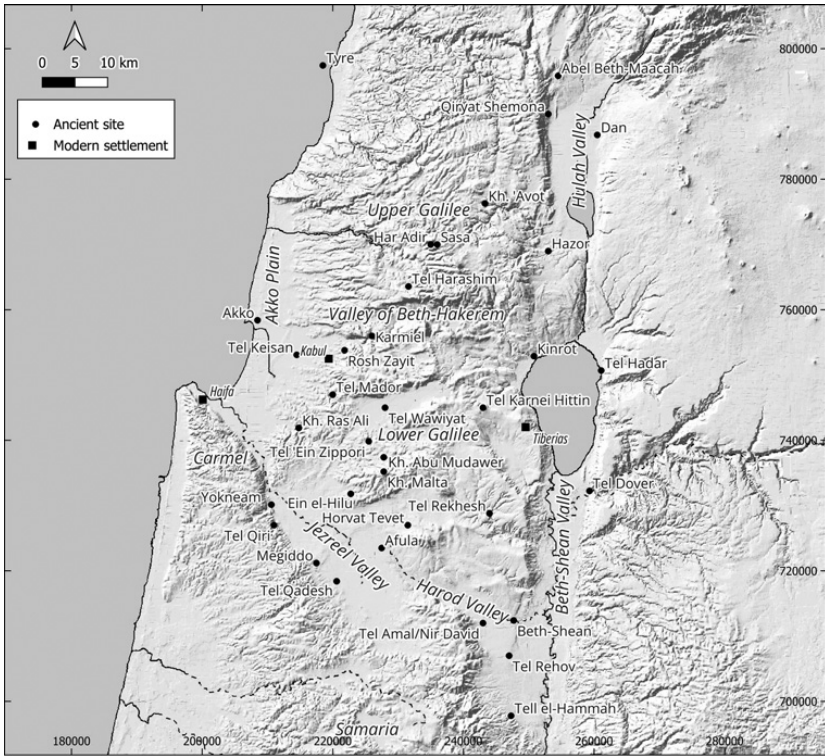


Figure 27 Map of the northern valleys and the Galilee (base map, courtesy of Gunnar Lehmann).

(Saladin), defeated the crusaders; the battle of Ayn Jalut (1260 CE), when the Mamluk sultan, Qutuz, defeated the invading Mongols; and many others.

In addition to being strategic, the valley is also quite fertile. In fact, the name Jezreel means “El sows,” almost certainly an allusion to the area’s fertility.

The Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys connect to a number of other valleys in the Great Rift Valley, such as the Kinrot and Hulah Valleys.² Together, these form a valley system with many similar cultural features, also shared in parts of the southern lower Galilee, located between these valleys.

² The Hulah Valley will be discussed in the next chapter as, historically speaking, it was more connected to the Galilee region.

THE VALLEYS IN THE IRON I

Although the region did not escape the wave of destruction during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron I, it quickly recovered. Thus, by the middle of the Iron I, the Canaanite inhabitants of these valleys were thriving, so much so that some scholars refer to this period as the “Canaanite renaissance.”³

The area was dotted with farming villages such as the excavated sites of Tel Qiri and Tel Hadar. Some of these villages were likely working royal lands under the control of the larger cities that dominated these valleys such as Megiddo, Yokneam, Beth-Shean, Kinrot, and Tel Rehov. This is a pattern that repeats itself throughout history with the farming villages in these valleys.

To give a sense of the size and material culture of the cities, let us take Megiddo, sitting on the edge between the Carmel ridge and the Jezreel Valley, as an example. The Canaanite city of Megiddo in the late Iron I (Stratum VIA) was a large settlement of approximately seven hectares, dense with residential structures comprising several distinct neighborhoods, along with a large temple and a palace (Figure 28).

Another example is Yokneam (Stratum XVII), located northwest of Megiddo. This was a large settlement extending even beyond the boundaries of the later Iron II city walls. Yet a third example is Tel Kinrot, which sits right on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. It was a planned city with an urban layout and wide streets.

Beth-Shean (Stratum S-2), once an important center for the Egyptian New Kingdom’s administration in Canaan, was destroyed in the early Iron I. When it was rebuilt later in the Iron I, the city spanned the entire four hectares of the tell and featured two temples.

THE NORTHERN VALLEYS IN THE IRON II

During the transition to the Iron IIA, most of these cities were destroyed either partially or entirely, and some were soon rebuilt along a different model. Again, Megiddo is the starkest example of what happened to the

³ Following Finkelstein 2003.

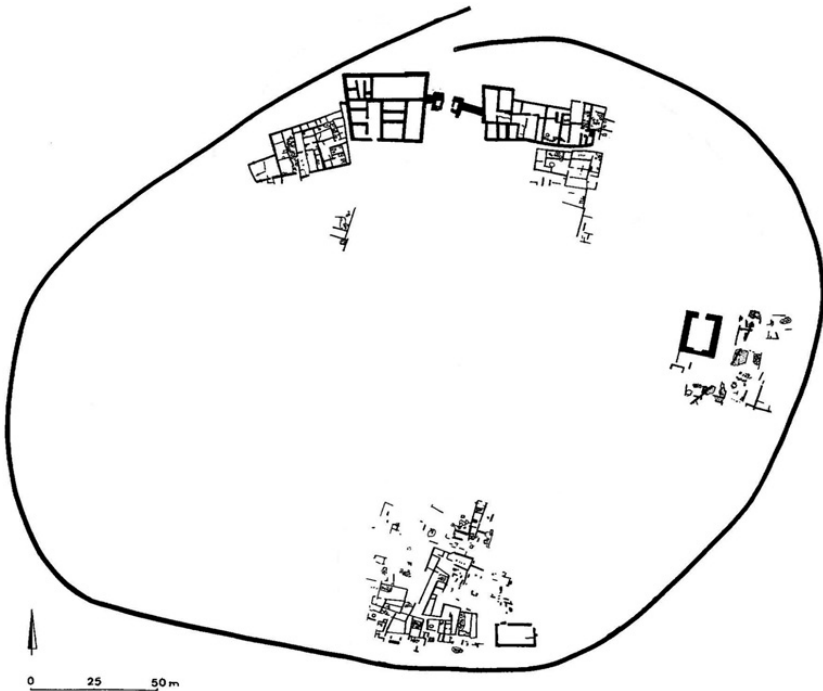


Figure 28 Plan of Megiddo VI.

cities in this area. Around 970 BCE, the city was destroyed. Soon after, it was resettled as a small town (Stratum VB), then (perhaps around the middle of the century) rebuilt as a large administrative city (Stratum VA-IVB), with many public buildings and even palaces (such as Palace 6000), but with only a few residential houses and no temple.

Yokneam suffered a similar fate. The Iron I settlement was destroyed. Soon after, at around the Iron I-II transition, people reestablished a poor settlement (Stratum XVI), which was followed by a short-lived unwalled city (Stratum XV) then, still in the tenth century, by a city with a massive casemate wall (Stratum XIV).

In a variation on this theme, the city of Beth-Shean (Stratum S2 and its equivalents) came to an end in the early tenth century, and the new city (Stratum S1 and its equivalents) was different in some important respects. First, the two temples ceased to be temples and were rebuilt as administrative buildings. Other large buildings were constructed during this period as well, and the city apparently became an administrative center.

Tel Kinrot was annihilated in the first decades of the tenth century, and with the exception of some squatting activity, it was not rebuilt at all in the Iron IIA.

Similarly, the city of Tel Rekhesh, located in the Lower Galilee just beside the Jezreel Valley, was also destroyed at the time, and settlement there drastically declined.⁴ Tel Dover appears to have suffered from a similar fate.

An exception to this pattern is the city of Tel Rehov, slightly south of Beth-Shean, as no evidence of destruction, conquest, or redesign were yet discovered in the excavations.

In contrast to what happened with most large cities, villages such as Tel Qiri, Tel Hadar, and probably also Tell el-Hammah continued into the Iron II. Not only that, at least one new farming village, Tel Amal/Nir David, was founded in this period, and Tel Qadesh (Tell Abu-Qudeis) likely should be seen in a similar light.

The continued existence of villages and their possible expansion into the Iron IIA, including the founding of more farming villages, is surprising when we compare it to what occurs in other areas, where farming villages are almost universally *abandoned*. The northern valleys are a clear exception to this pattern. Moreover, this exceptional survival of farming villages occurs in areas where cities are being destroyed, making the unique pattern even more striking.

Box: A Royal Estate at Horvat Tevet

Horvat Tevet is located at the edge of the modern settlement of 'Afula Illit. The excavators identified nine levels, the earliest of which (Level 9) is dated to the Late Bronze Age I. Settlement was resumed in the Iron Age I, when a village was established at the site (Level 8), and the excavators suggested it continued to exist through the early Iron IIA. Then, in the Late Iron IIA – at about 920 or 900 BCE – a royal estate

⁴ Is it a coincidence that Tel Kinrot and Tel Rekhesh were destroyed and not rebuilt, with both of them more or less in the Galilee, farther north, whereas the redesigned ones were in the Jezreel/Harod/Beth-Shean Valley proper?

Box: (cont.)

was built on top of the village, and the excavators suggested it was destroyed at around 880–870 BCE (Level 7). This estate was subsequently built and destroyed several times in the late Iron Age IIA (Levels 6–4), following which it was abandoned, and it was not resettled until the Iron IIC.⁵

This sequence, according to which the Iron I village continued to exist throughout the early Iron IIA, and then a number of royal estates were built, destroyed, and rebuilt within a relatively short period of time in the late Iron IIA, seems forced. One can surmise that such an interpretation was attractive to the excavators as a result of their adherence to the low chronology. After all, the historical scenario on which this chronology is based attributes Iron II royal activity only to the late Iron IIA (and later), and the excavators were therefore forced to push all the royal estate's Iron IIA levels to its later part. While unlikely, the sequence is not impossible. Nevertheless, further problems with this reconstruction go beyond improbability.

First, the parallels the excavators bring to the Level 7 ceramic assemblage are primarily for sites most scholars date to the *early* Iron IIA (like Rehov V and Hazor X) not the late Iron IIA.⁶ Moreover, the recent archaeomagnetic (or paleomagnetic) dating (see box “The Contribution of Archaeomagnetic Dating”) also suggests an Iron IIA date.

Level 7 at Horvat Tevet appears to have been destroyed at the same time as Rehov V and Beth-Shean, a co-occurrence that suggests the sites were destroyed during the same event, likely the campaign of the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I). This is supported by the radiometric dates from Rehov and by the fact that both Rehov and Beth-Shean are actually mentioned in Shishak's inscriptions.⁷

⁵ Sergi et al. 2021. ⁶ Ibid., for example, 41*, table 2. ⁷ Cf., Vaknin et al. 2022: 2–4.

Box: (cont.)

This new understanding makes much more sense as far as the stratigraphy of Horvat Tevet is concerned, and it puts Horvat Tevet's ceramics in line with that of other sites. It also makes good historical sense.

If the royal estate was destroyed by Shishak (ca. 920), then it must have been built earlier than this. The likely scenario is as follows: At some point in the early Iron IIA, the village was leveled, and the new polity that took over the region rebuilt the site as a royal estate.

While this fits nicely with the overall situation in the northern valleys, it is even more reminiscent of the situation in the nearby Galilee, discussed in Chapter 12. We therefore note that the northern part of the Jezreel Valley behaves largely like the valleys of the Lower Galilee, and that the division between these regions is to some extent arbitrary.

REDESIGNING THE VALLEYS

The combination of the two phenomena – the thriving of many farming villages and the destruction of most large cities – is a unique feature of the northern valleys in the Iron IIA, and the two are likely inter-related. Let's start with the cities: Many of them were destroyed either entirely or partially and some were rebuilt on a different city plan. How can we explain this?

One explanation popular nowadays is that the cities were destroyed in an earthquake. But this is highly improbable. First, the most common reason for cities to be destroyed is conquerors. Certainly earthquakes are sometimes the cause, but this should be backed up by material evidence such as unidirectional collapse of walls.

Second, the fact that Yokneam and Megiddo, which are not directly on a fault line, were entirely destroyed while Beth-Shean, which sits directly on the fault line of the Great Rift Valley, was only partially

destroyed, makes very little sense. Even worse, Tel Rehov, Beth-Shean's neighbor on the same fault line, was not destroyed *at all*. How could Tel Rehov and Beth-Shean, which both sit on the fault line, have survived an earthquake that destroyed Megiddo and Yokneam, both west of the fault line?

Another, bigger problem is that the cities were not rebuilt by the original inhabitants. It is possible, of course, that everyone was killed in a massive collapse, but if so, we might expect to see hundreds of skeletons. If they were not all killed, we would expect to see the city rebuilt along the same lines as it was before, since the same population rebuilds their own city after an earthquake.

Instead, we find that some of the cities, like Kinrot (and to a large extent also Tel Rekhes), are not rebuilt at all, and some, like Megiddo, are rebuilt along very different lines. This implies that a different people with different needs, attitudes, cultural conceptions, and perceptions of space was responsible for this rebuilding. If so, it seems more than likely that these people would be responsible for the destruction as well.

These observations also demonstrate that those who destroyed the city were not raiders but conquerors; raiders would not rebuild the city themselves but would leave the survivors to do as they pleased. This model also allows us to speculate about the anomalous status of Tel Rehov: Perhaps they accepted the conquerors with open arms. A city can make a treaty with an incoming enemy ruler, but not with an earthquake. In any event, the conquering polity took over the area, turning it into its own.

What was this conquering group trying to accomplish? As already noted, Megiddo is the starkest example and thus the easiest to grasp. The city was destroyed, the population was cleared, and after a short period, the city was redesigned as an administrative center for a larger government that ruled over it. In other words, the city was no longer an independent power ruling mostly over its own population and the surrounding countryside, but an administrative cog in a much larger wheel.

Yokneam too underwent this fate, though it retained more of a residential population than Megiddo. Finally, Beth-Shean was only

partially transformed, and much of its population apparently remained, though still it was redesigned according to the model the new overlords preferred.⁸

Who were these conquerors? The smoking gun in this case is that, beyond the general changes, the temples of Megiddo and Beth-Shean, which had served the local Canaanite populations for centuries, were not rebuilt. This, together with the appearance of LFS houses in cities like Megiddo (alongside indigenous types of houses), including Palace 6000, points squarely at an Israelite conquest.

The reason the Israelites would have wanted to dominate this area is clear: The Jezreel Valley was the road through which everyone needed to travel to get to the Mediterranean from the east, and vice versa. Moreover, it is a very fertile area, ideal for agriculture.

This model also explains the unique growth of the farming villages in these valleys in the Iron IIA. First, as the valleys were particularly fertile, it would make sense for Israel to encourage their cultivation (unlike other regions where it made sense to move people to other areas). This is likely the explanation for the continuity of villages such as Tel Qiri and even for the founding of new villages in the valley such as Tel Amal/Nir David and probably also Tel Qadesh. Even Tel Hadar, which was destroyed in this conquest, was rebuilt and continued as it was before, a farming village.

The local Canaanite villagers could easily switch allegiance to Israel, as Canaanites were doing all over the land by this point (cf. Chapter 6). And since villagers were already only clients working land that wasn't theirs, the only difference was that now they paid their taxes not to the nearby city-states, but rather to a larger polity that dominated these cities. In practical terms, since the Canaanite city-states such as Megiddo and Yokneam were rebuilt as Israelite administrative centers, the taxes were probably even delivered to the same places.

To be clear, the conquered villages were not repopulated by Israelites, nor did the locals simply become Israelites. They maintained their Canaanite, non-Israelite identity until these settlements came to an end

⁸ Other cities, like Tel Kinrot and Tel Rekhesh, were not rebuilt, probably because they were not deemed important for the new polity, and it is likely that the surviving population moved elsewhere.

later in the Iron II. This is apparent not only in the overall continuity and unique settlement history, but also by the lack of LFS houses in the villages and other characteristics that these villages never incorporate.⁹

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CITY DWELLERS?

Returning to the cities, we can now understand what happened to the people of sites like Tel Kinrot and Tel Rekhesh, which were destroyed, or even Megiddo, which was redesigned as an administrative center. Clearly some of the inhabitants were killed during the conquest, but not all or even most.

While some of the original inhabitants probably remained in the redesigned cities, many – probably most – moved elsewhere, most likely to the farming villages. Whether this happened because the locals thought this was a good option (unlikely), or whether the Israelites simply gave them no choice in the matter (more likely), the expansion of agriculture in the valleys during this period offers a persuasive solution to the problem of where (some of) the city dwellers went. As Baruch Halpern, the noted biblical historian and codirector of the renewed excavations at Megiddo in the 1990s, wrote: “On the basis of the evidence it looks as though the Israelite monarchy . . . scattered the population, deporting it from the lowland administrative sites to distributive locations more efficient for agriculture and husbandry around the Jezreel Valley.”¹⁰ With this push northward, Israel moved beyond the Samarian hill country and put the Israelites in control of an internationally important highway. But Israel’s northern expansion didn’t stop at the valleys.

⁹ For ethnic identity in the region, see Faust 2000, 2012: 230–254; Münzer 2013; see also Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 191–192; Mazar 2015:45–46. Note that the situation in the Shephelah was different, and the population gradually assimilated and became Israelite.

¹⁰ Halpern 2000: 559.

CHAPTER 12

The Galilee and the Phoenicians

THE RIDDLE: IN THE LATE IRON I, the Galilee was dotted with small farming villages. In the early Iron II, these were all abandoned while at the same time, large, fortified towns such as Hazor were built in the adjacent regions. Is there a connection between these two processes?

The Galilee is the mountain range in northern Israel, divided into the Lower Galilee in the south, extending from the Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys northward, and the Upper Galilee in the north, extending northward into what is today the southern part of Lebanon. The border between the two regions is the Beth-Hakerem Valley, from which the mountains begin to climb. The Lower Galilee is composed mostly of small hills – most are less than 500 meters high – with many large valleys in between them; the Upper Galilee is much higher with some peaks more than 1,000 meters high, and the terrain is much more difficult (Figure 27). The mountainous region has served as the home of many groups, at times, even as a sort of refuge for minorities like the Druze.

Also included in this region is the Hulah Valley to the east of the Galilee. While geographically it is part of the northern valleys, its settlements were often regarded as part of the Galilee settlement system that served as its hinterland, and hence we discuss it in this chapter.

THE STORY OF HAZOR

Hazor is one of the most famous cities in ancient Israel, both because of the Bible and due to archaeology. Biblically, the city is described as “the head of all the kingdoms,” and it is said to have been conquered by

Joshua, burned down, and left as rubble. The city appears again in the famous story of Deborah in the book of Judges as an important city that Israel must fight and in the book of Kings as a city that Solomon built, and more.¹

Archaeologically, the Canaanite city of Hazor is one of the largest of its kind. At the height of its power, in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, it was a massive urban center more than sixty hectares in size. It had an acropolis and a lower city, both of which were fortified, as well as multiple temples and a palace. The city was destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze Age and was not rebuilt for more than a century. Later in the Iron I, it was sparsely inhabited and appears to have housed a tiny village.

This changed in the tenth century, when Stratum X of the acropolis was built from scratch by new inhabitants. Although it was only a small to mid-sized city of some three hectares, it was preplanned and well fortified with a casemate wall and a monumental gate. The change from sparsely inhabited village to fortified administrative center is stark.

SETTLEMENT TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE GALILEE DURING THE IRON I–II TRANSITION

Hazor was not the only site to be built from scratch in this area in the early Iron IIA.²

North of Hazor we have the large mound of Abel Beth-Maacah, where the Iron I city was destroyed, and a new Iron II city was built along different lines and incorporated many public buildings.³

Around the same time, Tel Karnei Hittin (“Horns of Wheat”) was established in the eastern Lower Galilee above the Arbel Plain. The city was around five hectares, fortified, with an acropolis on its southern edge.

Also established at this time was Tel Mador (Khirbet Abu Mudawer ‘Iblin) on the southwestern edge of the Galilean Hills where it abuts the

¹ For a “friendly” summary, see Ben-Tor 2023.

² For a discussion with references, see Faust 2021b: 27–28; see also Gal 1992.

³ Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018: 152. This pattern is similar what we have seen in the Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys (with which the region shares many similarities, of course).

Akko Plain, very close to what would have been the Phoenician hinterland. The city was less than four hectares, but it was fortified and had a small gate.

Farther to the southeast, an Iron IIA fort was established in a different Khirbet Abu Mudawer (quite a few sites in the Lower Galilee have this name, which means “the rounded”). The fort that controlled its surroundings was only partially excavated, but appears to have been twenty-five by twenty-five meters with a system of rooms around a courtyard, a tower, and an indirect approach.

Who built these sites, and whence did the people who were to live there come? To answer this question, we need to expand our horizons.

The transition from the Iron I to the Iron II was accompanied by the abandonment of many villages in the Galilee, including Qiryat-Shemona in the Hulah Valley; Sasa, Khirbet ‘Avot, Tel Harashim, and Har Adir in the Upper Galilee; and Karmiel, Khirbat Ras Ali (Tel Alil), and Ein el-Hilu in the Lower Galilee. Additionally, several relatively large Iron I villages in the intermountain valleys in the southern part of the Lower Galilee, such as Tel Wawiyat and Tel ‘Ein Zippori, were devastated and completely or partially abandoned during this same period. Could it be that the new Galilean cities/forts were populated by some of the former inhabitants of these abandoned villages?⁴

A HOSTILE TAKEOVER

At this point, the reader may have lost patience with us. How many times are we going to rephrase the same riddle? A group of towns or cities appears out of nowhere while a host of villages disappears off the map. We apologize, of course, if the answer seems obvious, but it must be noted that it becomes obvious only once we have taken a bird’s-eye view of late Iron I/early Iron II Israel.

Such a bird’s-eye view brings us back to the question of why the people decided to abandon their villages for cities. We have seen in previous chapters that sometimes the move was voluntary, carried out by villagers who sought a better, more defensible or more hospitable location, whereas in other cases (e.g., in the Negev), the move was forced or heavily

⁴ Others probably went to the northern valley villages discussed in the previous chapter.

incentivized. Given that the Galilee region was the home – refuge might be a more apt word – to many distinct groups, it is likely that, in this area, some groups moved voluntarily while others were forced, depending on the relations between each group and the polity that took over.

Given that most of the tiny villages in the hilly parts of the Galilee, including the Upper Galilee and the higher, northern parts of the Lower Galilee, were settled by groups of similar background to the Israelites that subsequently formed alliances with them and eventually became Israelites, the settlers probably abandoned their tiny villages and moved to better locations voluntarily. Indeed, most of these sites appear not to have been destroyed.⁵

In contrast, the southern villages of Tel ‘Ein Zippori and Tel Wawiyat were harmed by the same kingdom that caused the destruction of the cities in the valleys, namely the Israelites. The inhabitants of these villages were sedentary Canaanites, and it is probable that the conquered villagers were resettled in the central sites and in the valley farming villages by coercion. J. P. Dessel, who excavated Tel ‘En Zipori, hypothesized that: “With the emergence of a centralized government, existing pockets of local power needed to be co-opted, controlled, or removed.”⁶

For other southerly sites such as Ein el-Hilu, in which no destruction was unearthed, the matter is less clear. Given the fluidity of identities at the time, however, and the constant shifting of alliances, the exact situation in some sites cannot always be ascertained, but it appears that they all fit into the general pattern.

As already noted, which polity was responsible for this change in settlement patterns is clear. Not only is the mere establishment of a city at Hazor in line with the changes throughout the country, making the highland polity the most obvious candidate, but this is also indicated by the finds. First, in tenth-century sites throughout the Galilee, we see the appearance of LFS houses – for example, at Khirbet Malta. Moreover, while the exposure of tenth-century Hazor is limited, and no complete houses were exposed, we do find such houses there later in the Iron IIA.

⁵ Compare Levin 2007; for references to the various sites, see Faust 2021b: 27–28.

⁶ Dessel 1999: 31.

Second, when Hazor was rebuilt in the Iron IIA, one area inside the new city was not rebuilt, and it remained unbuilt through the Iron Age: the area where a large (earlier) Canaanite temple or ritual center once stood. As we discussed in previous chapters, the avoidance of temples is a telltale sign of an Israelite takeover. It is likely that the local population, some of whom were clearly Canaanite, did not want to build on the consecrated grounds on one hand, but the polity in charge forbade them to rebuild the temple on the other. Leaving this area as *haram* was the only possible compromise between the religious sensibilities of the local population and the strict, anti-temple policy of the new polity.

One important difference between the settlers of these new cities and the villagers permitted to remain in the northern valleys is that the population of the latter was Canaanite while the population of the former was mixed. These Galilean settlers most likely included Canaanites, along with a few Israelites moving from the south, as well as members of tribal groups from the Galilee very similar to the Israelites and affiliated with them. These tribal groups settled the Galilean highlands around the same time the Israelites settled in Samaria, Benjamin, and Judea, and in the tenth century, it probably took very little time or coaxing before this group was fully integrated into Israel. They soon adopted an Israelite identity and their genealogies were linked together.⁷

A NOTE ON TYRE

This chapter would not be complete without some reflection on the western Galilee's other important neighbor, the Phoenicians, or, more specifically, Tyre.

At the same period as the Israelite polity was formed and consolidated, the Phoenician city of Tyre and the territory it controlled was beginning its long journey to becoming the economic engine of the entire eastern Mediterranean, and even well beyond. Nevertheless, our knowledge of

⁷ Compare Scott 2009: 173, 176, 226–234, 265–270, and see Excursus 10.1.

Tyre itself is very limited, as is our ability to delineate the boundary of its hinterland.

As already noted, most of the hilly Galilee seems to have been settled by groups very similar socially and culturally to the Israelites and became part of the kingdom of Israel in the tenth century. But this is not true of the entire region.

Rosh Zayit, on the western slopes of the Galilee overlooking the Akko Plain, tells a more complex story. Here, a fort was erected in the mid-tenth century BCE, replacing a small village, and remained for about a century. Zvi Gal, an archaeologist (formerly) with the Israel Antiquities Authority, suggests that while the early small village might have been part of the same Israelite-like settlement wave that we find elsewhere in the Galilee, it was replaced by the Phoenician fort in the tenth century. Gal connects this sharp change with the biblical story of Solomon giving cities in the north to Hiram, the king of Tyre.⁸

Although the identity of the early pre-fort villagers is difficult to say due to the meager finds from this period, Gal's identification of the fort as Phoenician is solid, and his reconstruction of a shift from a village founded by the "standard" group of Galilean settlers to a Phoenician outpost seems plausible.

While Gal's reconstruction was admittedly motivated by the identification of the site as biblical Cabul, and hence a result of the biblical narrative, it must be stressed that the non-Israelite identity of the fort's inhabitants is supported by the extensive use of imported pottery at the building, a style of pottery that Israelites, including the very Israelite-like Galilean tribes, avoided.

Rosh Zayit is but one example of the Phoenician presence in the western Galilee during this period. In fact, all the settlements on the Akko Plain appear to have been Phoenician, forming part of the hinterland of Tyre. It is likely that the nearby Tel Mador, an Israelite site established in the tenth century just above the Akko Plain, served as a sort of fort guarding this direction.

⁸ See Gal and Alexandre 2000: 199; see also Chapter 15.

EXCURSUS 12.1 THE SECOND WAVE OF ABANDONMENT: THE FINGERPRINTS OF THE HIGHLAND POLITY

As this chapter completes our geographical survey, it is a good place to take a step back and reflect on what we call the second wave of abandonment. Unlike the first wave, which took place mainly in the central highlands toward the end of the Iron I and was an important *cause* of Israel's emergence as an independent polity, the second wave of abandonment is an important *consequence* of the expansion of this polity.⁹

ABANDONMENT IN PHILISTIA

With the flexing of Israelite muscle, the Philistine threat essentially disappeared as did the Philistines' dominance over larger areas. Practically all the small sites in Philistia, whose populations appear to have been mainly Canaanites, were abandoned. It is possible that some of the population was killed during the hostilities, but the rest must have moved elsewhere, some perhaps to the Shephelah (joining the growing settlement there), whereas others may have been forcefully moved to other, less ideal regions like the Negev Highlands.¹⁰

THE BEERSHEBA VALLEY ABANDONMENT AND THE ARAD AND NEGEV SETTLEMENTS

With the exception of Beersheba itself, which gradually developed from a small settlement into an Israelite town, other settlements in the Beersheba Valley were destroyed or abandoned. At the same time, a few new settlements were founded in the Beersheba-Arad Valleys, and a huge number of tiny settlements and homesteads popped up in the Negev

⁹ The reconstruction that follows uses many examples of a larger pattern, and while we are positive that (additional) exceptions will be discovered in the future, the overall patterns are not likely to be affected by such discoveries.

¹⁰ If these Canaanites had originally been forced to settle in Philistia, as some suggest, it would not be surprising that they were happy to leave once they could and therefore made this move voluntarily.

Highlands. These new settlers were most likely transferred there from other regions, some from the Beersheba Valley, others from areas like Edom, perhaps even from villages in southern Philistia. As the Negev Highlands are a harsh place to live, it seems likely that the move was forced on most of them, or at least heavily incentivized by the new kingdom.

TRANSJORDAN

A major crisis is also evident in Transjordan, and many excavated sites in Moab and Ammon ceased to exist in the first half of the tenth century BCE. Some of the population probably fled the existing sites in response to Israelite incursions, while others were captured and transferred to places like the Negev casemate structures. And at least in Ammon, we see a central site that grew and was fortified in this period, likely for defensive purposes against Israelite incursions.

THE GALILEE VILLAGE ABANDONMENT AND THE GALILEE CITIES

Many Galilean villages were abandoned in this period, and their former inhabitants apparently moved to newly constructed cities. This seems to have been part of a large project, and many of the people, especially in northern Upper Galilee, moved voluntarily to newly established sites because of economic incentives and better opportunities. The valleys of the southern Lower Galilee were apparently peopled by Canaanites whose settlements were destroyed, who were forced to move to the new larger sites being constructed or to the villages being maintained in the valleys.

THE NORTHERN VALLEYS: CITY DESTRUCTION AND VILLAGE ENLARGEMENT

This is the one case in which the admittedly limited evidence suggests that “abandonment” worked differently. Here, cities were destroyed and villages continued and were even established. While some of the population might have been killed during the hostilities that accompanied the destruction of so many urban sites, and others resettled in rebuilt central

sites such as Yokneam, the rest – whether from destroyed cities such as Kinrot or from depopulated cities such as Megiddo rebuilt as administrative centers – either moved or were transferred to villages.

Not only did the population of (some) villages remain in their place as vassals of new masters, but new villages were founded. These villages probably sat on “royal lands,” and the Israelite overlords were only too happy to have this fertile land farmed.

Although one could look for alternative explanations of any given fact surveyed in this chapter, all can be neatly explained with one answer once we realize that this is all an integral part of the emergence of the highland polity and its military and political expansion north, south, east, and west.

Part III

A New Paradigm

We are now approaching the integrative part of the book, in which we will merge the broad outlines of the archaeological data with aspects of the biblical account into a coherent scenario of how the monarchy emerged in ancient Israel. As part of this, we will look at ethnographic evidence and comparative historical material to frame the discussion of the roles of the individuals the Bible names as the leaders of Israel during this period, namely Saul, David, and Solomon.

In order to do this, we need to examine the archaeological and textual information within a broader, comparative perspective. The first chapter of Part III (Chapter 13) will therefore briefly summarize the archaeological picture of the Iron I–II transition in ancient Israel as presented in detail in the previous chapters. Although the resolution of the archaeological data is too limited to address specific historical figures and events, the broad outlines will serve as a baseline for the next two chapters.

Chapter 14 will review the emergence of kingdoms and empires within a comparative historical and anthropological perspective, looking

at what we know of these processes from other cultures that went through similar transformations. Chapter 15 will integrate the archaeological and anthropological information with the biblical evidence in an attempt to paint a detailed picture of the emergence of the monarchy in ancient Israel. The chapter will reconstruct not only the broad historical processes but also the actual events that took place in the Land of Israel in the eleventh–tenth centuries BCE, including the roles of Saul, David, and Solomon in the formation of the monarchy and its subsequent actions. Based on the arguments presented in Chapter 15, Chapter 16 will retell the history of the Iron IIA/United Monarchy period, not as the Bible told it, but as we think it occurred.

CHAPTER 13

The (Re)Appearance of Solomon

The Archaeology of Israel's Highland Polity

In Chapter 3, we discussed at length Maxwell Miller's argument for a very limited Solomonic polity. One of the main reasons he gave was the lack of archaeological support for an extensive United Monarchy as historians had previously supposed based on the biblical description of Saul, David, and Solomon. In his discussion of these archaeological problems, Miller asked a provocative question: "[I]s the emerging archaeological picture such that, even if there were no Hebrew Bible and archaeologists had no prior knowledge of Solomon, would they likely have hypothesized by now something on the order of the Solomonic empire and golden age to explain their findings?"¹

To this, he answers "I think not," which is why he puts forward his alternative historical picture of Solomon – and by extension David – as a small-time chieftain. In the previous chapters, we have shown that the picture is more complex. While the United Monarchy was not a Hollywood-style empire, it controlled a large territory and had a relatively complex administration.

REFUTING THE REFUTATION

Why did Miller's careful analysis prove so wrong? First of all, the broader archaeological picture on which Miller and many of his contemporaries relied did not stand the test of time. Skeptical scholarship pointed to the dearth of material finds in Jerusalem, absence of international trade, lack

¹ Miller 1997: 20.

of any finds for Edom or any contacts with Arabia to argue that the background to the stories were rooted in the late Iron Age.

But, as discussed in Chapter 3, it is now clear that Jerusalem not only existed in the tenth century BCE but was quite large, that international trade was thriving throughout the Mediterranean – there were even (indirect) contacts with the Indian Ocean – and that Edom not only existed but even flourished at the time. Thus, many of the reasons behind the doubts that were cast some twenty-five years ago were not well founded. If anything, these finds support the existence of the United Monarchy and by no means contradict it.

But, as we tried to show in Chapters 4–12, the archaeological evidence is not merely commensurate with the historicity of such a mid-sized power centered in the highlands in the tenth century, but supports – perhaps even demands – the existence of such a polity.

IN DEFENSE OF THE UNITED MONARCHY: RECONSTRUCTING THE RISE AND EXPANSION OF THE HIGHLAND POLITY

FIRST PHASE: THE FORMATION OF THE NEW POLITY. Let's start with the first wave of abandonment, which takes place in the hill country in the eleventh century BCE, and the concomitant development of central sites. The best explanation for this is as a response to a threat from a persistent enemy, which must have been the Philistine coastal cities, as only they would have been large enough to pose a real threat to the highland villagers. The Canaanite villages in the Shephelah were too small to have posed any serious challenge, and even the Canaanite cities in the northern valleys could not have exerted such influence on the highlands. Moreover, the material cultural distinction between the Israelites and the Philistines was stark, showing that these groups defined themselves in relation to each other.

This clash between the Philistine cities and the highland villages forced the highland settlers to change their lifestyle from diffuse rural villages to a more centralized society, living in what became (mostly in southern Samaria) fortified towns. This was followed, in a generation or two, by further changes in the settlement patterns of the region (see Figure 5).

SECOND PHASE: EXPANSION AND IMPACT. While in the period of the first abandonment, Philistia was powerful and densely settled, after the Israelites gradually moved to living in fortified central sites, some Philistine city-states shrank and most of the smaller Philistine-dominated sites were abandoned entirely. At the same time, the Shephelah underwent a radical change.

First, the few existing Canaanite villages also became fortified central sites with some Israelite identity markers such as the LFS house. This shows that these towns were now aligning themselves with the Israelites. Soon after, the rest of the Shephelah, which had been almost entirely empty in the twelfth–eleventh centuries, began to fill up with new settlements. By the end of the Iron IIA, the Shephelah was packed with sites, whereas Philistia became more sparsely settled than before.

This seesaw effect is best explained by assuming that when the highland group centralized, they ended up becoming more powerful than the Philistines. Consequently, they began to dominate the area, weakening the Philistines, who realigned toward trade with the Phoenicians, opening up the Shephelah to settlement.

Also during the tenth century, the Sharon Plain, which had been sparsely inhabited, doubled in population – especially in the Yarkon area. Notably, the Sharon was abandoned again before the Iron IIB, showing that something unique was occurring that inspired the settlement of this region. But what was it?

The Sharon is a very difficult place to settle; it is an ecologically fringe swamp-land. The point of settling it, especially the Yarkon region, is for access to the Mediterranean. Who would need such access to the sea via the Yarkon? Given the geography of the region, only the newly emerging highland polity, with its capital in the region of Jerusalem, would need this.

Indeed, we have a clear indication that the masters of the Sharon were Israelites. In the Yarkon basin, Tel Qasile, whose earlier strata had a temple, was destroyed in the early tenth century and subsequently rebuilt (Stratum IX), but without a temple. The Israelites were quite unique in their tendency to practice cult in simpler settings, and usually without central temples. They recreated this cultic landscape in sites they captured and rebuilt, as can be seen (in addition to Tel Qasile) in

Megiddo, Beth-Shean, Hazor, and even Shechem. Another sign of Israelite presence at this time is the founding of Tel Mevorach, just to the north of the Sharon near Dor, with a large, formal LFS residency perhaps housing a local governor or Israelite liaison.

This fits with the changes in Gezer (mentioned in Chapter 3), on the highway between Jerusalem and Jaffa (and the Yarkon basin). The Iron I city (Stratum 10) was destroyed by the end of this period, and a temporary settlement was built on top of the ruins (Stratum 9). Slightly later, an impressive town was built (Stratum 8) with public structures and a six-chamber city gate (which the excavators attribute to Solomon).

Another major change took place in the Beersheba Valley. The largest settlement, Tel Masos, was destroyed, along with a number of its satellite settlements, while Beersheba survived, grew, and entered the Israelite orbit. At the same time, Arad was settled in the nearby Arad Valley, and later perhaps also the town of Tel Malhatah. This destruction and settlement is best explained by assuming that the hill country polity expanded south: Those who worked with the Israelites were spared and joined them; those who did not were destroyed.

It seems unlikely that all the inhabitants of the destroyed towns were killed. Instead, many of them were likely moved into the Negev Highlands, as during this period, tens of new settlements suddenly appeared there. Among these new sites, sixty or so were fortified settlements, clearly built by the new polity, and they exhibit Israelite traits such as the construction of LFS houses.

The settlements were agricultural, not military in nature, but the purpose of this expansive settlement was first to control the segment of the lucrative spice trade from Arabia which was directed to the Mediterranean, and second – and perhaps more importantly – the sea-bound routes of the copper trade from Edom. Moreover, it could also serve as a gate to the Edomite copper mines themselves.

We can see this control in several ways. First, in Feinan (KEN), we find large and impressive LFS houses; this shows the presence, at least symbolic, of Israelites at the heart of this massive copper production center. That it accompanies the erection of the first fortifications at the site strengthens the evidence for an Israelite role there. At Timna too

excavations reveal the construction of a fortified settlement with goods imported from the north, and even Mediterranean fish. Clearly, in the tenth century, copper production not only boomed but was closely connected with the settled country to the north, specifically with Israel.

Central Transjordan also went through settlement changes in this period. In Moab and in Ammon, we see large-scale village abandonment, likely in reaction to Israelite incursions. In contrast, in the Gilead, we see the opposite: settlement continuity and even the founding of new settlements. Ethnic identity and cultural affiliations appear to be the key factor in determining the success of each region (or group). When faced with the growing Israelite power, those who identified as Israelites, as the inhabitants of the Gilead did, or were able to connect themselves to this polity, thrived; those who did not shrank in power and population.

The settlement changes in the northern valleys show a unique combination of features, also best explained by the Israel-expansion paradigm. Many of the big cities were destroyed. Some were reorganized as administrative centers (Megiddo) with very little room for inhabitants, and they were rebuilt without temples (Megiddo and Beth-Shean). Others (Kinrot and Tel Rekhes) were left largely or entirely destroyed. At the same time, instead of village abandonment, many of the villages of the northern valleys thrived, and even new villages were built.

The simplest explanation for these interlocking phenomena is that Israel moved north, destroyed or conquered the local independent Canaanite cities, and later reorganized them as Israelite administrative centers. They then took some of the former inhabitants of these cities and moved them to the valley to found new villages alongside the existing ones. These villagers worked the royal lands and now the villagers simply paid their taxes to these new overlords. As the valleys were very fertile and economically important, the kingdom transferred former inhabitants of the cities to new locations and even formed new agricultural villages (including the royal estate at Horvat Tevet).

Finally, in the Galilee, far to the north, we find the old pattern. Villages were abandoned and the population moved to central Israelite sites such as Hazor. Other sites, like Abel-beth-maachah in the Hulah Valley, were destroyed and rebuilt following a different plan (like in the

northern valleys). Again, we see the power of the Israelite kingdom and the desire to reorganize its territory. As in other regions, the ethnic identity of the population played a major role in determining its fate. Those who were close to or became Israelites flourished, whereas others suffered.

All in all, we can see the expansion of the new polity not only by the trail of destruction and abandonment it left in its wake, but also by more concrete pieces of evidence that point us directly toward the culprit.

First, in almost all of the new areas into which the newly established highland polity expanded, we find the erection of nicely built, large, classical (in form) LFS houses. Such impressive structures are now found in various sites in the Negev and Feinan, as well as in the Shephelah, the northern valleys, and the Sharon Plain. The structures were usually built in conspicuous locations and were used as an architecture of power, transmitting the identity of the new polity that directly or indirectly claimed control over these areas.

Second, when the conquered cities were rebuilt, this was done without temples. This can be seen, for example, in Tel Qasile, Megiddo, Beth-Shean, and Hazor.

All these help us map the advent of the highland polity (Figure 29; see also Figure 16).

THE MATERIAL AND THE SOCIAL: THE MATERIAL MANIFESTATION OF RISING SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

These large-scale changes directly reflect the expansion of the highland polity, but additional evidence reveals also growing social complexity of this era; we refer here mainly to the sharp changes in pottery style. While these are the end result of a gradual process, they all took place or at least matured at the time discussed here, and appear to be connected with the sociopolitical changes described in Chapter 5.

Some changes are very broad, indicating growing social complexity throughout the region, and the breaking of local, regional potting traditions, whereas others are more specific.

The first includes the sudden increase in the popularity of slip and burnish, peaking around the mid tenth century. This change symbolized

social complexity and perhaps changes in gender relations that resulted from it. Another major change was the disappearance of many local ceramic traditions, resulting in a more uniform assemblage over larger parts of the country. This change reflects a more connected polity.

It is not only the more uniform pottery that is in line with the discussed transformations, but even the specific changes are revealing. For example, during this period, the highlanders stopped producing Collard Rim Jars (CRJs). These noticeable pithoi dominated the Iron I assemblages, but all but disappeared from the Cisjordanian highlands in the tenth century.

The CRJs symbolized the wealth of the families and kinship units, and their abandonment reveals the decline of the former lineage culture, which could compete with the powers of the new leaders. Naturally this could not have happened without the abandonment of the villages, which forced most of the traditional families to move anyway, and the cessation in the production of CRJs symbolized the new sociopolitical structure (even if the lineages persisted, of course).

At the same time, pottery styles became more varied and the highland population adopted a much larger repertoire of forms than in the previous era, reflecting the development of a social hierarchy and diversity.

While this was occurring in Israel, the Philistines also changed their pottery styles, quite suddenly dropping Aegean-inspired pottery and moving to the more Phoenician-inspired Ashdod Ware. This shows how the Philistines were no longer attempting to highlight their cultural differences with the Israelites and Canaanites. Instead, while maintaining a separate identity, they focused on economic integration with the Phoenicians, their wealthy coastal merchant neighbors to the north.

Another local ceramic change was the appearance of Negev Ware. While the changes in ceramics in the north included greater variety in forms, but a strong homogeneity within each form, Negev Ware presents us with the opposite trend: This was a coarse, handmade pottery with only a few forms but with great variety within the forms themselves. This pottery comprises some 40 percent of the pottery unearthed in the Negev Highland sites, and appears to have been used mostly by people who were settled in the region by

force, in an attempt to create an identity distinct from that of the kingdom that forced them to settle in this remote and hostile environment.

These large-scale changes, which took place over a large territory and in the course of a number of generations, indicate the increase in social and political complexity in the tenth century and highlight the processes leading to, even enabling, the emergence of the Israelite monarchy.

CAN ARCHAEOLOGY IDENTIFY THE UNITED MONARCHY?

To return to Miller's question: Without the Bible, does archaeology on its own imply a local monarchy arising in the highlands in this period and becoming the dominant power? The answer is yes.

Moreover, even if many of the specific details in the Bible turn out to be wrong – as must be the case since the biblical account is riddled with contradictions – the overall picture of a monarchy arising in this period is corroborated in archaeology.

DAVID, SOLOMON, EMPIRES, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RED HERRINGS

This argument marshals considerable evidence, but none of it obvious or blatant. Readers hoping to read about monumental architecture with bombastic inscriptions about Saul or David's military exploits will be disappointed. Even the Solomonic gates pale in comparison with the Roman Colosseum. When touring Europe, we can immediately identify Roman pillars or bridges and point to the remains of this once-powerful empire. For those looking for an Israelite equivalent of pillars, finding LFS houses and fortified towns may feel overly subtle.

And yet, as we will discuss further in Chapter 14, Rome may be familiar, but it is an exception, not the rule. Many powerful polities can be recognized only by putting together subtle clues as we did earlier in this chapter, thus painting an overall picture.

Leaving the Mediterranean entirely, let us examine the remains of another well-known empire, that of the Aztecs. In their article

“Archaeology and the Aztec Empire,” Michael Smith and Francis Berdan open by stating this problem explicitly:

The relative invisibility of the Aztec empire in archaeological terms has long been noted by scholars, and three explanations of this condition have been offered. First, some authorities do not accept that the Aztec phenomenon was a “real empire” like the Roman or Inca empires, and therefore are not surprised to find few obvious Aztec archaeological remains outside of the Basin of Mexico core area . . . A second viewpoint holds that the Aztec polity does indeed deserve the designation “empire,” but the indirect or hegemonic nature of the provincial control did not lead to major Aztec investments in material remains in the provinces . . . A third explanation is that archaeologists have not carried out a sufficient number of problem-oriented projects addressing this issue to evaluate fully the effects of Aztec imperialism.²

The article argues that, in the Aztec case, “the nature of imperial organization and a lack of relevant archaeological studies together account for the low archaeological visibility of the Aztec empire outside the Basin of Mexico.” Smith and Berdan therefore push for ethnohistorical analysis of Aztec imperial strategies, and for formulating problem-oriented studies to identify imperial presence. These, however, include mostly subtle changes like a decline in the quality of life in villages once they were incorporated within the empire (because most of their surpluses would be taken from them). Thus subtle evidence is what we *should* be looking for!

In previous chapters, we took such an approach to show the effects of Israelite expansion during the tenth century. Our analysis reveals the many fingerprints of this regime. But does this mean the highland polity was an empire? And is it possible that a remote and peripheral area, inhabited by small villages, gave rise to a powerful polity, even if only on a regional scale? To answer this question, we need to expand our horizons.

² Smith and Berdan 1992: 353.

CHAPTER 14

David's Empire?

The Highland Polity in Historical and Anthropological Perspective

GIVEN THE LIMITED OCCUPATION of the highlands in the Iron I, comprised of dispersed small villages, is it possible that the region's sparse and simple population suddenly developed into a complex and large political entity that ruled over larger territories and administered them?

Many, like Miller (quoted in Chapters 3, 13), feel that the answer must be negative. But even if one does not accept the rather minimal thesis that David (or Solomon) was a small-time chieftain, was he an emperor? How far can we stretch the evidence?

ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE, IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS, AND EXPECTATIONS

The mere notion that David or Solomon ruled over an empire does not resonate with a modern audience. Whatever one thinks about the extent of the territories David ruled, can this really be called an empire? We all know what empires look like, and, even writ large, the United Monarchy just doesn't fit with this picture.

WHAT IS AN EMPIRE? THE PROBLEM OF IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS 1. When most of us think of empires, we envision vast, long-lasting realms with fixed capitals and large, solid administrations. The Roman empire, for instance, probably the most famous empire in history, dominated the entire Mediterranean area, built roads and monuments throughout its territory, and lasted for centuries. The British empire had colonies and mandates, such that it was said "the

sun never sets on the British empire." It too lasted, in some form or another, for centuries. The Assyrian empire, which controlled the entire Near East in the eighth–seventh centuries BCE, is another example.

All these, and many other examples one might think of, had large and impressive capitals, established bureaucracy and state apparatuses, and their material fingerprints are well known even today. The sheer size, success, clear material manifestation, and long-lasting nature of the Assyrian, Roman, and British empires are what make them such obvious examples. These factors are floating in the back of our heads and are part of what makes it difficult to think of David and Solomon as emperors. But there is a subtler, yet more significant reason for the dissonance between our expectations for empires and the reality of the highland polity, related to what many imagine to be the basic prerequisites of any empire.

HOW DO EMPIRES EVOLVE? THE PROBLEM OF IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS 2. It is usually assumed that the establishment of a large territorial entity requires a certain level of political, social, and economic development; without this, a large kingdom – an empire – cannot evolve, let alone be controlled. Since the Iron I highlands did not possess such foundations, many today question the very possibility of a Davidic or Solomonic empire.

So, while most of us view Britain, Rome, and Assyria as unusually successful empires, we would be quite comfortable with extending the status of empire to less grandiose examples, but these would still need to have begun as powerful kingdoms.

For instance, when Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479–1425 BCE) led the Egyptian army into Canaan, conquering the local city-states and putting them under Egyptian rule, most of us would have little trouble seeing this as an empire. The Aztec or Inca are additional well-known examples of empires that also began with a powerful and politically sophisticated core.

All of these, and many other examples that could be thrown in, are easy for us to accept as empires since they began as powerful states that expanded and conquered the territory of their neighbors. This, at a minimum, is what we expect to see in the origin story of any empire, which naturally leads to skepticism about calling the highland polity an empire.

Nevertheless, this skepticism is itself based on shaky foundations since the expectation that empires must begin as developed and powerful states is wrong on both theoretical and practical grounds. Let's begin with the second premise – that empires are the result of a long process of social evolution in which strong kingdoms or states conquer other territories and expand.

THE NEO-EVOLUTIONARY MODEL OF SOCIAL COMPLEXITY: CHALLENGING IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS 2

The assumption that empires develop from states is in line with a prevalent, neo-evolutionary understanding of how societies grow in complexity. Neo-evolutionary approaches have deep roots in the social sciences, but they became especially influential in the anthropological understanding of state formation in the 1960s and 1970s.

Much of the credit can be given to the important and highly influential work of American cultural anthropologist Elman Rogers Service (1915–96), who argued that societies gradually develop from simple to complex. Service, and others following him, identified the following four main types of societies:¹

Type 1 Bands or Mobile Hunter-Gatherer Groups

Throughout most of (pre)history, humans were organized in small groups of hunter-gatherers, often referred to as bands. These were mobile groups of some twenty–seventy individuals, each with its own territory. They met other groups on occasion, to celebrate and to find spouses, but stayed within their own territories most of the time.

The size of the territories varied depending on ecological conditions, which also influenced the size of the bands and the number of times they moved their camp during the year. These groups lacked real property and were socially and economically quite egalitarian; ingrained differences were based only on age and sex. Things began to change only with the gradual introduction of agriculture about 10,000 years ago.

¹ Service 1962; see also Renfrew and Bahn 2016: 180–183.

Type 2 Tribes or Segmentary Societies

Whatever the causes for the beginning of agriculture may have been, it increased the carrying capacity of most areas and enabled more people to live in them. Agriculture therefore facilitated and often dictated sedentation as people had to maintain (immobile) fields.

These larger, sedentary groups of people, now living permanently in villages and subsisting mostly on agriculture, are called tribes or segmentary groups and incorporated hundreds or more individuals. Obviously, such a society had more property to deal with and more ways to differentiate between people. Nevertheless, such groups were still fairly egalitarian with no engrained socioeconomic stratification.

Type 3 Chiefdoms

As population grew and surpluses were accumulated societies became more complex, and someone had to organize the surpluses and redistribute them, to resolve disputes, and so forth. This led to the emergence of some form of permanent leadership, usually based on genealogy. This level of social complexity is referred to as chiefdoms. The new chiefs held authority, but it was limited, and had only a small group of assistants helping in the administration of the surpluses, usually close kin and not professional.

With the advent of chiefdoms, ingrained differences emerged within society, mostly based on genealogical relations – for example, the degree of closeness to the founder of the group – and usually not very sharp. As the chiefs did not have an army or police force to back up their decisions, they had to conform to social norms, much like the king depicted in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* who only gives commands that will inevitably be obeyed, like ordering the sun to set at sunset. Otherwise the chieftain risked not being obeyed, or worse, being deposed and even killed. Chiefdoms are much larger than segmentary groups and incorporate thousands of individuals, and sometimes more.

Type 4 States

As society became larger and more complex, there were concomitant economic advances: the production of more surpluses, development of trade in these surpluses, and so forth. This naturally led to a need for

further organization, and so evolved the state. States can incorporate tens of thousands, even millions of people.

In order to control such large bodies, the rulers needed bureaucracy and administrative apparatuses, which became increasingly professional over time. Perhaps even more important, the rulers now had significant power to back them, like an army or a police force, and could coerce people to pay taxes, work, go to war, and so forth.

Social and economic differences within state society are sharp, and with the advent of states came the stratification into classes; the rich accumulated more wealth and bequeathed it to their children, thus creating class differences.

As states are viewed as the most complex level of social organization, much effort has been spent in understanding how they evolved – a point to which we shall return – as well as to “types” of states, such as early states, mature states, and more.

Empires: When we work with this neo-evolutionary model in the background, the move from state to empire is intuitive. Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery, for example, when attempting to define an empire, simply wrote: “For a state to become an empire . . . it must incorporate people of other languages and ethnic groups.”² We will refer to these (and other) requirements later in this chapter, but as the quote shows, an empire is seen as a large state that extends its muscle over weaker polities and thus increases its revenue base. In this sense, it can be seen as a super- or mega-state.

Assuming that societies always evolve through the stages listed here, then any given society must first become a state and only then can turn to empire building. Nevertheless, this is not really the case.

PROBLEMS WITH THE NEO-EVOLUTIONARY MODEL. Neo-evolutionism has received its fair share of criticism on various grounds. While we acknowledge the enormous contribution of this approach to scholarship, its influence also had negative effects, resulting in important patterns not receiving due attention.³

² Marcus and Flannery 1996: 207.

³ We cannot summarize the issue here. For some of the critique, see Yoffee 2005; Pauketat 2007. See also the review of Bouchard 2011.

First, these “stages” are ideal types. Very few societies accord with any given stage exactly; many intermediate “positions” exist along what is actually a continuum between bands and sophisticated states. Scholars further agree that societal stages do not develop necessarily in a simple, unilinear evolutionary trajectory; not every chiefdom, for example, will evolve into a state.

Another, subtler problem has to do with the important place state formation holds in neo-evolutionary thinking. As noted, states receive a great deal of scholarly attention in an attempt to understand the processes that lead to their formation, and many scholars have even created typologies of states. This, in turn, has led to a problem that is more a result of focus than any actual error.

The attempts to understand the evolution of social forms of organization led to a strong focus on understanding primary processes – that is, when did the first state evolve, why, and how? Indeed, the insights gained from neo-evolutionary thinking on primary processes are still very valuable.

In contrast, secondary processes – that is, how additional states were formed near an existing one – did not draw much attention, not only because the answer seemed quite obvious – they copied their neighbors – but also because anything that had to do with diffusion (of ideas or peoples) was very unpopular at the time.⁴

But secondary processes are actually more complex than they are sometimes given credit for, and while the overall progression outlined in neo-evolutionary thinking – simpler societies developed into increasingly complex states, some of which became empires – has validity, it is not representative of all cases.

AN ALTERNATIVE PROCESS OF EVOLUTION? The empirical information we possess shows that not all societies evolved gradually, slowly passing from one level to another. Contact between simple and complex societies upsets the appletart, so to speak, and allows for such societies to jump past earlier stages directly into later stages.

⁴ See also Pauketat 2007: 24–25.

Empirical evidence indicates that empires do not always emerge through a slow process of gradual increase of social complexity, in which an empire evolved from a mature state, which in turn developed from a simple one, and so forth. And when we say that this is not always the case, we do not mean to say that we found an exception that we will pull out of our hats like a white rabbit. Instead, we are making a much broader claim.

A FLOCK OF BLACK SWANS. Following Jewish, Austrian-born British philosopher Karl Popper (1902–94), many agree that it is impossible to confirm or prove a hypothesis; it is only possible to falsify one. To be considered scientific, a hypothesis must be falsifiable.

For example, if someone were to claim that nothing really happened in history because the world was created yesterday, and all evidence to the contrary was planted by a crafty deity who wants us to believe that the world has a past, that is not a scientific claim since there is no way to prove that it is not true. Once one makes a claim that is falsifiable, however, such as “all empires began as complex states,” the claim is treated as legitimate until it is falsified.

We can illustrate the logic with a reference to a claim that all swans are white. The claim cannot be proven since we cannot locate all the swans in the world and examine them one by one. The claim, however, can be easily refuted; all we need is to find one black (or red, or any other color that isn’t white) swan and we have falsified the hypothesis. Thus the hypothesis that all swans are white is scientific, and, as a consequence, it can be accepted as legitimate as long as all the swans we encounter are white, and until we find a swan that isn’t white. At that point, some would claim, the hypothesis could be modified slightly to “most swans are white,” if, for example, only one or two black swans were found, or it could be abandoned altogether, if so many black swans were found so as to make even a modified version of the hypothesis untenable.

To apply the swan analogy to our discussion of state formation: We are not arguing in this chapter that we have found a black swan. Rather, we are arguing that many, perhaps most, swans are black.

Returning to states and empires, we claim that many empires did not start as states. History has seen manifold rapidly expanding empires,

which began with a charismatic leader of a small group – no more than a chieftom to use the previous classification – taking advantage of specific circumstances. Indeed, quite a few such conquerors, who went from being nobodies to chiefs to rulers of large empires, are well known in history. Let us elaborate on two such examples.

GENGHIS KHAN. Only little is known for certain about Genghis Khan's origins and upbringing. While it is not always easy to sort legends from history, historians do have a general outline of the rise of Genghis and his Mongol empire. The following is a simplified summary of what most authorities consider reliable:⁵

In the thirteenth century CE, the group we now call the Mongols was not really one people and certainly not one political entity, but a group of nomadic clans fighting each other on the outskirts of the great empires of the Jin and Xia (east and west northern China, respectively).

Temujin – Genghis's given name – was born in 1162 to Yesugei, the chief of the Borjigin/Borjigid clan, a small band of poor nomads subsumed under the larger and more powerful Tayichiud tribe. It is said that when Temujin was only nine years old, Yesugei was poisoned by enemies from the Tatar clan and died. The Borjigins quickly washed their hands of this apparently useless family – two mothers with a gaggle of children – and abandoned them to their fate. But Yesugei's family held on against the odds and survived.

Over time, Temujin became a local warrior chief and succeeded in forming alliances with powerful chiefs of other groups such as Torghil (Ong Khan) of the Kereyid tribe and Jamuka of the Jadaran clan. As his realm and influence expanded in the nearby steppe, Temujin realized that in order to rule over larger territories, the traditional raiding and looting would be insufficient and changes had to be made. Thus, instead of promoting only kin to positions of power and leaving dominated clans to feel alienated, Temujin established a merit-based system, at least

⁵ Our brief account relies on Weatherford 2004; McLynn 2015. Much of what is known, whether fact or legend, about Genghis Khan's early life comes from an old Mongolian work called *The Secret History of the Mongols*, written at the time of the Mongol expansion. A scholarly English edition of this work is Anon 2001.

officially, among tribes. Moreover, Temujin incorporated the conquered groups into Mongolian society, instead of crushing and humiliating them and turning the survivors into slaves. The way he united the newly incorporated groups was through fictive kinship.

Temujin is credited with instituting other changes. For instance, the Mongol soldiers used to loot individually during battle and each person kept what he took. Temujin, however, made a rule that all looting would take place only after the battle was won and would be centralized and systematic. He also required some of the loot to be paid out to widows and orphans of soldiers who died in the battle.

After taking over all the tribal lands in Mongolia, Temujin resorted to ideological means to legitimize his rule. For example, he gave himself a new name, Genghis Khan, meaning something like “the firm or fearless Khan”/“fierce or tough ruler.” He further decided to give all of his people one single identity. He chose the name of his own group, the Mongols.⁶

As the supreme leader of a united Mongolia, Genghis created an official law system and had a Uighur scribe, who was among the captive peoples, introduce writing into the legal and governmental systems. By 1206, Genghis Khan had created a kingdom with a powerful standing army that he could use to continue his conquests. From here on, however, the people conquered would not be considered Mongols, but subjects.

Genghis Khan’s accomplishments as a conqueror from this point forward in his life are well documented since he started attacking kingdoms with real sophisticated administrations and, most importantly, scribes. What stood out about the Mongol army were the innovative tactics his best generals are credited with introducing into warfare, including the ability to fire arrows while riding and selective use of false retreats.

As Genghis considered the Chinese the main enemy of the Mongols, they were his main target. He first conquered the Xia, the area of northwestern China, and it was during this campaign that the Mongol army learned about siege warfare, at which they would eventually excel. Next, he turned his forces to the Jin empire in northeastern China, laying siege and sacking the capital in Zhongdu (Peking/Beijing).

⁶ The full name of his people was *Yeke Mongol Ulus*, “the great Mongol nation” (Weatherford 2004: 65).

In 1219, Genghis Khan, already fifty-seven years old, led his army across the Tian Shan mountains, and in two years, took the vast Khwarezmian empire, which had been much bigger and wealthier than his own.

Mongol expansion in all directions continued past Genghis Khan's death in 1227. Only during the reign of his son, Ogedei, did the Mongols build Karakorum, the first Mongolian capital city. They also expanded west as far as Hungary. Under Genghis's grandsons, even more land was taken, with Hulegu taking Baghdad, and Kublai taking southern China. This, however, was already the beginning of the end.

Although Kublai called himself the Khan of Khans, this was in name only. Certainly, by the end of Kublai's life, the great Mongol empire – the largest land empire in the history of the world – was split into different kingdoms with only a loose affiliation.⁷ The momentum of conquest held the empire together a little past the life of its founder, but not much.

SHAKA ZULU. Less grandiose than the story of Genghis, but perhaps more relevant for our purposes, is that of Shaka, founder of the Zulu nation in southeastern corner of Africa.⁸ In this case too, it is not always easy to distinguish between legends and history, and the beginning of the story is hard to know given the conflicting accounts. Shaka was apparently born in 1787, the son of Senzangakhona kaJama, a chief (r. 1781–1816) of a small African group called the Zulu, and a woman named Nandi, the daughter of the (deceased) chief of the Langeni tribe, who may or may not have been Senzangakhona's wife for a time.⁹

One way or another, Shaka grew up as a fatherless outcast among the Langeni. He eventually moved to join the Mthethwa and presented himself to their chief, Dingiswayo (r. 1806–17). Shaka's physical prowess, natural charisma, and gift for military strategy rocketed him up the ranks of the army. Dingiswayo was taken with him on one hand, but dismayed at his violent war tactics on the other.

⁷ Weatherford 2004: 190–191.

⁸ The account here relies primarily on Eldredge 2014. For a look at how the accounts about Shaka have changed and developed, see Hamilton 1998, especially chapter 2. For an analysis focused on the person of Shaka, see Kets De Vries 2005. For an accessible/popular telling of the story, see Taylor 1994: 39–108.

⁹ Hamilton 1998: 66–69; Eldredge 2014: 42–51.

Shaka's strong relationship with Dingiswayo paid off tremendously in 1816. When Senzangakhona died, Shaka's younger brother Sigujana took the throne. Shaka took the power from Sigujana by force and killed him, and Dingiswayo, to whose tribe the Zulu were subservient, supported him. Thus Shaka became chief of the Zulu – a tribe of some 1,500 or 2,000 people – and a vassal to Dingiswayo.

It is said that one of Shaka's first moves as chief was to institute a new military policy. He had come to the conclusion that the standard method of war, using the long assegai spear and throwing it at the enemy, could be overcome handily by an army that would attack the enemy head-on in a tight crescent formation, using shorter spears with larger blades (*ixwa*) in one hand and large shields in the other, and he changed his army's tactics accordingly. Shaka also made his troops train barefoot to strengthen their skin and make them able to run in any terrain faster than if they were wearing the traditional sandals.¹⁰

A year after Shaka became chief, Dingiswayo fought a battle against Zwide, chief of the Ndwandwe. Although the exact circumstances are surrounded with legend – and there are various accounts as to why Shaka did not participate in the battle – Dingiswayo was captured and killed. Not one to miss an opportunity, Shaka established himself as leader of the Mthethwa, a much larger group than his own Zulu tribe.

As was inevitable, Shaka's army soon clashed with that of Zwide. The serious campaign came in 1821, after Shaka had sufficiently consolidated his Zulu kingdom and added a number of small tribes to it. In this battle, Shaka pretended to retreat until the Ndwandwe army was exhausted, after which he turned his army back upon them and destroyed them.

The tremendous expansion of the area under Zulu control required Shaka to organize a more complex form of government. The entire population would take the name of his group, the Zulus. Part of making sure his people all mixed (and would not maintain their former identities), Shaka made age-related groups, *amabutho* (a system already in use by Dingiswayo and others), both for men and for women, that cut across

¹⁰ Kilfoil 1971: 17; Kets De Vries 2005: 32–34.

previous tribal lines. The male groups were military, and when they had accomplished enough, Shaka would free them to marry the female *amabutho*.¹¹

Throughout his reign, Shaka conquered more territory and expanded. One of the outcomes of Shaka's rapid expansion, as well as his harsh treatment of his enemies, was that the areas he conquered were often depopulated. In fact, even the nearby region suffered greatly: Neighboring chiefs and kings fled, leading to the abandonment of their territories. This, in turn, damaged the areas they entered, but also led to the creation of new polities in the periphery. This ripple effect from Shaka's expansion – known as Mfecane/Difcane (“crushing” or “scattering”) – impacted much of the southwestern part of Africa.¹²

Shaka's capital, Bulawayo, was a large kraal (a Dutch word for African villages) with huts at the periphery and open space in the center,¹³ and this is where he met European traders, with whom he was always on friendly terms. Shaka's rule lasted only about a decade. In 1827, when much of his army was out on a military expedition, his half brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, together with Shaka's bodyguard, Mbopha, stabbed him to death.

Dingane took the crown (r. 1828–40), followed by yet another brother, Mpande (r. 1840–72), and the Zulu kingdom continued on for a few decades, though slowly contracting. Eventually, during the reign of Mpande's son and Shaka's nephew, Cethshwayo (r. 1873–9), war broke out with England, the Zulu lost, and Zululand became a province in England's South Africa holdings.

Although the Zulu empire lasted only two generations, for a short time, it was a major power in the region. The name Zulu is remembered in history as a major and large group even though the actual Zulu tribe that started it was tiny and insignificant.

The cases of Genghis Khan and Shaka, which are but particularly famous examples, show how polities can be created out of practically nothing and

¹¹ Kets De Vries 2005: 44–45; Bjerk 2006: 3; Eldredge 2014: 83–85.

¹² While scholars debate how responsible Shaka is for these events, it is clear that his activities contributed to this process. See the various views in Hamilton 1995; and the more recent summary of Wright 2009; Eldredge 2014: 9, and references.

¹³ Some six to nine hectares; and see Whitelaw 1994.

expand quickly. These empires did not evolve from well-established bureaucratic states, but from simple societies, not at the level of a state (as defined earlier in this chapter). In other words, those large empires evolved quickly and did not go through the expected evolution over time.

EMPIRE BEFORE THE STATE? OFTEN. The observation that empire often precedes state and even brings it about is not ours but has been noted by a number of eminent scholars such as Boston University anthropologist Thomas Barfield, who writes, “[F]rom an archaeological perspective it appears that empires were the templates for large states, and not the reverse. Historically, empires were the crucibles in which the possibility of large states was realized. Indeed, it is difficult to find examples of large states in areas that were not first united by an empire.”¹⁴ Although Barfield may be overstating the case, he is certainly correct that many empires throughout history led to the formation of states, with bureaucracy, administration, and so forth, and not vice versa. Similarly, Russian anthropologist and archaeologist Nikolai Kradin writes about “stateless empires,”¹⁵ and University of Columbia archaeologist Ellen Morris simply referred to the phenomenon of “an empire before the state.”¹⁶

DURATION AND THE NATURE OF THE IMPERIAL MATERIAL REMAINS (OR DEBUNKING IMPLICIT ASSUMPTION 1)

We devoted most of the chapter to showing that, contrary to our instinctive expectation, many empires did not develop from slow processes of growing social complexity but rather rapidly expanded, often unexpectedly. The examples of Shaka and Genghis Khan are also useful in debunking two further somewhat interrelated, instinctive expectations referenced at the beginning of the chapter.

Based on the Roman, British, and Assyrian examples, we often imagine that, of necessity:

1. Empires are long-lasting and well-established entities.
2. Empires leave a clear material signature, with grand imperial remains.

¹⁴ Barfield 2001: 33. ¹⁵ Kradin 2011. ¹⁶ Morris 2018: 11–38.

The absence of these expected characteristics of empire has served to demonstrate the implausibility of the United Monarchy.

1 SHORT-LIVED EMPIRES. Many empires did not exist for long. Turning again to the Mongols and Zulus, both empires rose very quickly and collapsed almost as quickly, within a generation or two after the death of their charismatic founder, after which they either disintegrated into separate, smaller, polities (Mongols) or shrank significantly (Zulus). The great Hun empire built by Attila is another example, as it didn't outlast him *at all*, but collapsed entirely within a few years of his death. As Bristol University historian Stephen Howe writes, "Vast imperial systems could be created, and then collapse, within a single short lifetime."¹⁷

2 NONSPECTACULAR REMAINS. Unlike the impressive archaeological finds from the Assyrian or Roman empires, many empires did not leave grand material remains. In fact, even their capital cities were often simple and unimpressive. Genghis Khan ruled from a huge tent camp, and only his son built a permanent city, which, though large, was relatively unimpressive.¹⁸ Shaka ruled from a large kraal with many hundreds of huts, but nothing grandiose. The same is true of Attila the Hun, who had no capital city and lived in an unadorned wooden palace.¹⁹

In Chapter 13, we noted that even more established empires like that of the Aztecs, often lack the expected material "correlates" (although, in the Aztec case, an impressive capital was not lacking). Thus we should not expect much direct grand evidence for short-lived empires. Instead, we need to work with indirect evidence, as was indeed suggested for the Aztec empire, and as we did for the highland polity in this book.²⁰

In short, neither the ephemeral nature of the polity itself, nor the ephemeral nature of the imperial remains can be used to argue against the historical likelihood of a Davidic empire.

¹⁷ Howe 2002: 37. ¹⁸ For example, Phillips 1969: 96.

¹⁹ Described by the Roman scribe Priscus of Priam. See fragment 8 in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, translated by J. B. Bury.

²⁰ See Chapter 13.

WHAT IS AN EMPIRE?

We are not arguing that the Roman-type empire is not a legitimate model. Certainly, many empires indeed evolved from well-established states that expanded and conquered additional territories, and that were then efficiently controlled for centuries from a large and impressive capital via sophisticated administration which left ample textual and material remains. This, however, is merely a type of empire; these elements are not part of the *definition* of an empire.

While the wording might vary, what all definitions of empire share is the expansive nature of empires, their composite character, and the disparity of power that they create. In other words, an empire is a political body that expands and takes control of other areas and other groups, making it by definition multiethnic, and maintains disparity in power between the dominant center – that is, the homeland of the original and ruling group whence the polity expanded – and the dominated periphery.²¹

This basic definition of an empire would include the highland polity portrayed in the previous chapters. Its relatively modest size, dominating only a few groups on its periphery, is clearly not a problem; while many empires were extremely large, covering vast territories, many, like Israel's highland polity, were limited in size. Moreover, the way the Bible describes the creation of this polity fits well with what we know from history and anthropology about the mechanisms behind the formation of such empires.

HOW STRONG STATES AND EMPIRES ARE (OFTEN) CREATED: AGENTS AND OPPORTUNITY

In his classic 1999 article, University of Michigan archaeologist Kent Flannery notes the long debate over whether state formation is driven by “agents” – that is, charismatic leaders who push their people to new heights – or “process” – that is, circumstances such as ecology, demography, and technology that pave the way for change.²²

Flannery argues that these are not really two conflicting models, but complementary ones. Favorable circumstances lay the groundwork for

²¹ For example, Sinopoli 1994: 159, 160; Howe 2002: 15, 30; Faust 2021a: 3–6.

²² Flannery 1999.

powerful agents to take advantage of them, and agents are the type of people who can see opportunities and have the will and talent to make the most of them.

Flannery writes:

Aggressive human agents are born in all cultures in all epochs, but it takes pre-existing conditions of social inequality and chiefly competition, followed by biased transmission, competitive advantage, expansion, and territorial incorporation, to turn a chief into a king.²³ To be sure, the agent manipulates ideology to encourage new social forms. But an agent born in the Late Pleistocene, unaided by the processes listed above, had no chance of creating a state.²⁴

Flannery surveys five state-forming modern agents for whom we have good historical records, including Shaka, and in a tongue-in-cheek manner, he lays out “a list of instructions for creating early states”:²⁵

1. Be born an “alpha male” with an aggressive, authoritarian personality.
2. Be of elite parentage, but not in the main line of succession – just close enough to covet the chieftainship.
3. Gain upward mobility as a military commander.
4. Usurp the position of chief even if it requires assassination.
5. Subjugate your nearest neighbors first.
6. Seek a competitive advantage over more distant rivals.
7. Using that advantage, expand into more distant territories.
8. Where the environment permits, use corvée labor to provision your army, raise your subjects’ population, and keep followers content by building irrigation canals, rice paddies, or agricultural terraces.
9. Where the environment does not permit such intensification, raid neighbors’ caravans or cattle herds.

²³ “Biased transmission” refers to how leaders adopt successful strategies from their predecessors. For example, Shaka’s adoption and development of some of Dingiswayo’s military tactics.

²⁴ Flannery 1999: 18.

²⁵ Flannery 1999: 14–15. The other four are: Osei Tutu I of Ghana (ca. 1675–1717), Mir/Thum Silim Khan II of the Hunza in the Karakorum mountains (1790–1824), Kamehameha I of Hawaii (1782–1819), and Andrianampoinimerina of Madagascar (1787–1810).

10. Solidify your position by power-sharing, even if it is little more than a gesture.

In essence, when resourceful, charismatic, and ruthless chiefs were able to take advantage of the right circumstances, as well as benefiting from a bit of luck, they could create a rapidly expanding empire before their tribe/chiefdom even became a state. Flannery does not discuss the great state-forming conquerors of premodern times, but the list works well for them too.

More importantly for our purposes, the list works quite well for (the biblical story of) David and the founding of the so-called United Monarchy. If the author of Samuel was not basing his story on a real character, it feels as if he at least read Flannery's article.

DAVID'S EMPIRE? YES

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, is it possible that a conquering polity emerged from the small villages of the central highlands of ancient Israel, rapidly expanded, and went on to subordinate its neighbors? The answer is an unequivocal yes.

When evaluating the question of whether the United Monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon is historical, the main question is not whether a small, tribal population *could* have created such an expanding entity – as we have shown, such a thing is certainly possible – the question is only whether it did. As the archaeological record shows, the answer to that question is clearly yes.

Even the term “empire,” despite our culturally biased expectations, seems justified, as it denotes a political body that expands, taking control of other areas and other groups, and maintaining a disparity of power between the conquering center and the controlled territories.

Such empires often arose when charismatic and ruthless chiefs or warlords of small groups took advantage of favoring circumstances, consolidated their power among their core group, and then expanded quickly, causing mayhem among their neighbors when they seized control over their territories. Such control could be direct, when the local king or chief was killed and the territory annexed and the population

subjugated, or indirect, when the local king or chief became a client of the expanding one and paid tribute as a token of surrender. As is so common in such instances, these entities often did not last very long and although the founder's son sometimes embarked on construction activities (e.g., Ogedei Khan), they usually disintegrated within a generation or two after the death of their founder, and did not leave many material remains that directly reflect imperial grandeur.

All this fits the image of the short-lived Israelite kingdom that lies at the basis of the biblical stories about Saul, David, and Solomon. While small-scale by comparison to some, the archaeological evidence for this expanding polity – or, yes, empire – as presented in the previous chapters fits nicely with this pattern, especially in light of the weakness of the traditional centers of power at the time, which created the right circumstances for an agent like David.

What remains is to reconstruct the details as best as possible from what we have. For that, we turn to Chapter 15, a synthesis of the biblical record, sifted carefully with modern methods of critical scholarship (see Chapter 2), collated with the archaeological picture we have laid down in Chapters 4–13, and informed by historical and anthropological literature on comparable political processes as discussed here.

CHAPTER 15

From Tribe to Empire to State

Synthesis of Archaeological, Anthropological, and Biblical Data

WE HAVE SEEN THAT THE DOUBTS SURROUNDING the historicity of what scholars call the United Monarchy are not based on real data (Chapter 3). A critical analysis of the biblical narratives suggests that the figures themselves are most likely historical (Chapter 2) and the overall reality described in the stories is in line with the reality discovered by archaeology (Chapters 4–13) and is clearly plausible in light of what we know from ethnography (Chapter 14).

In the following, using the archaeological data available to us, and supplementing the broad changes and long-term processes identified by it with a sophisticated – as opposed to a naive – use of biblical material, all interpreted in the light of modern anthropology, we will offer a detailed synthesis of the evidence surveyed in the book.

1 THE IRON AGE I: ISRAELITE SETTLEMENT, CANAANITE PERSISTENCE, AND PHILISTINE DOMINATION

The twelfth and eleventh centuries were a period of decline throughout large swaths of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. The traditional centers of power such as Egypt and Assyria withdrew to their geographical core, and some such as the Hittites and the Mycenaeans disappeared altogether. International trade declined dramatically, and many tribal groups emerged. In most regions, including the Land of Israel, there were no strong, expansive polities. Instead, power resided with what are often called tribal groups based on kinship ties.

ISRAELITES, PHILISTINES, AND CANAANITES. The population inhabiting the Samarian and Judean highlands, which eventually formed the core of what became the Israelite polity, was scattered in small villages. The people had no central government to speak of, and lived mostly on a subsistence economy of agriculture and herding, with some surpluses traded with neighboring villages.

Southwest of these villagers were several large city-states ruled by the Philistines, who came from somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean or the Aegean region. The Philistines entered the Cisjordan not long after the Israelites appeared on the scene, but while the latter settled in small rural villages in the highlands, the former settled in the larger southern cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and probably also Gaza.

As foreigners, the Philistines were culturally distinct from the local, Israelite, and Canaanite groups.¹

- They made extensive use of Aegean-style pottery, what is called Mycenaean IIIC Monochrome, which developed later in the Iron I into Philistine Bichrome. Toward the end of the Iron Age I, this pottery comprised some 35–50 percent of the finds in the Philistine centers.
- They brought Aegean-style figurines with them, which looked different than the local Canaanite variety.
- They consumed a large amount of pork, often some 15–20 percent or more, in contrast to locals, who at this time consumed little if any pork.
- They made use of hearths, which we don't find in local buildings.

When the Philistines arrived, they apparently did so with sufficient strength to become the dominant force in the southern coastal region. This does not mean that they cleared out the local population. Instead, many of the local inhabitants who continued to live in the Philistine centers gradually assimilated and became Philistines in the Iron I, while the population of the small peripheral settlements, which the Philistines dominated, retained their non-Philistine or “Canaanite” identity.

¹ Chapters 4, 5, and 7.

This explains the variations we find between the Philistine centers and the surrounding villages: It is in the central cities, where the Philistines lived, that we find Monochrome pottery and even larger quantities of Bichrome pottery, along with copious pork consumption, not in the nearby towns and villages, which were populated by Canaanites.

Just outside the Philistine reach was another small group of Canaanites. They lived in several villages in the trough valley, the easternmost part of the mostly empty Shephelah – that is, the lowlands situated between the Philistine-dominated region and the highlands.² These villages were mostly independent, functioning as a kind of buffer zone between the Philistines and the highland Israelites.

All the Canaanite settlements in the south – whether subordinate to the Philistines or not – avoided traits associated with the Philistines, such as the consumption of pork and the use of hearths, Aegean-like figurines, and Monochrome pottery.³ Later, the Bichrome pottery was used in these Canaanite settlements, but in low percentages, and probably only by the elites as status symbols; pork, hearths, Aegean-like figurines, and other Philistine traits continued to be avoided.

Even further removed from the Philistines were the Canaanite city-states in the northern valleys, who were not in continuous contact with them. Even so, we can see that the impact of the Philistines was felt (negatively) even there, since pork consumption in these city-states was very limited – an expression of cultural demarcation.⁴

² Khirbet er-Rai is the exception here.

³ Generally, they consumed no pork at all (0–0.5 percent).

⁴ The importance of pork can be seen in the sharp variation between groups with regard to its consumption. Whereas the Philistines consumed large quantities of pork, other groups either avoided pork completely (i.e., Israelites and southern Canaanites) or consumed very little (i.e., northern Canaanites). Furthermore, nobody consumed intermediate amounts of pork (4–8 percent). It appears that because high levels of pork consumption were seen as a Philistine trait, no groups wanted to be remotely similar, and this impacted food habits even in distant regions (see Chapter 7; Faust 2018a).

Box: The Avvim

While scholars often refer to the local population by the generic term “Canaanites,” the Bible specifically refers to the Canaanites in the vicinity of Philistia as Avvim (or Avvites). Joshua 13:3 describes the southern coastal region thus: “From the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is reckoned as Canaanite. There are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron, and the Avvim.”

We don’t know whether the term “Avvim” was used by the local population under Philistine dominance – the biblical texts were written hundreds of years after the Iron I, and this term reflects the way the Israelite scribes viewed much of the population of this region, namely as a subset of “locals” who lived near or among the Philistines, but who were not part of them.

Deuteronomistic tradition describes the Philistines as having annihilated the Avvim (Deut. 2:23): “So, too, with the Avvim who dwelt in villages in the vicinity of Gaza: the Caphtorim [Philistines], who came from Crete, wiped them out and settled in their place.” While this is a typical Deuteronomistic exaggeration, the text appears to be right about the overall contours of what occurred: Cretans/Aegeans came and conquered the local population.⁵ Archaeologically speaking, the evidence shows clearly that the local Avvim were not destroyed but remained as a dominated group (as implied in Joshua 13:3).

If the Canaanites to varying degrees expressed their differentiation from the dominant Philistines by the avoidance of Philistine cultural traits, the Israelites did so even more noticeably. They completely avoided pork at this time and made no use at all of the decorated Philistine pottery, not even the Bichrome pottery.

At the same time, traits associated with the Israelites, such as the collared rim jar, were completely avoided by the Philistines as well as by the

⁵ See also Genesis 10:14 (1 Chron. 1:12) and Amos 9:7.

Canaanites in the south, thus demarcating the boundaries between the three meta-groups (each was, of course, comprised of different subgroups or tribes). It is quite clear, however, that the Philistines were the culturally dominant group, and all others defined themselves in reference to them.

In the second half of the Iron I, the Philistines started raiding the highland villages, eventually leading to the widespread abandonment of villages in favor of more central sites (Chapter 4 and later in this chapter). Whether the Philistines' goal was simply to collect the agricultural surpluses for themselves or whether this was in preparation for an attempt to permanently dominate the entire region, is unclear (and see more later in this chapter).

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

This broad-brush outline tallies well with that of the overall biblical story. With the lack of any strong empire, the multiplicity of small groups vying for power in the various local arenas is the most recurring motif in the book of Judges. Furthermore, both the growing importance of the powerful Philistine city-states and their hostile relationship to the Israelite highlanders are reflected in the biblical stories, mostly those set toward the end of the pre-monarchic period (i.e., the story of Samson) and during the time of Samuel, Saul, and the early years of David.

Beginning in the Samson story, we see the Philistines as an important enemy, at least for the tribes of Dan (Samson's tribe), as well as the tribe of Judah, which is entirely under the Philistines' thumb. Thus, after Samson kills a group of Philistines to avenge the burning of his wife and father-in-law, he runs to Judah to hide (Judg. 15:9–11):

Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah, and made a raid on Lehi. The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and they said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then have you done to us?"

We see a similar sentiment in the book of Samuel in the story of the first battle of Ebenezer. The story is set in the time before Samuel's tenure as

judge, when the sons of Eli, the high priest of Shiloh, bring the Ark of the Covenant into battle. The Philistines hear of this and are worried, but offer themselves encouragement (1 Sam. 4:9): “Brace yourselves and be men, O Philistines! Or you will become slaves to the Hebrews as they were slaves to you. Be men and fight!”

The Philistine speech, of course, is a literary creation, an example of what the great Greek historian Thucydides describes as the prerogative he takes when it comes to speeches: “[T]he speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion.”⁶

Moreover, neither of these two stories are, at their core, historical. The character Samson is mostly if not entirely folklore, while the first battle of Ebenezer is a generic battle account introducing a set of miraculous tales about the power of the Ark of the Covenant.⁷

Even so, the stories are working with an historical premise confirmed by archaeology: In the late pre-monarchic period, the Philistines were strong and well organized and lived in large settlements, whereas the Israelites were weak, disconnected, and lived mostly in small villages under the shadow of the ever-present Philistine threat.

The power of the Philistines is also paramount in the account of Saul’s rebellion (1 Sam. 13:3): “Jonathan struck down the Philistine *netziv* in Geba; and the Philistines heard about it.” Translators differ on how to understand the Hebrew word *netziv*. Some suggest that it means he defeated a garrison, others that he killed the prefect, and it has even been suggested that he overturned a pillar. Whatever it means, the act had the symbolic import of showing that the Israelites were no longer accepting the Philistine presence in their midst.

The image of Philistine domination is confirmed in a later verse explaining the difficulty the Israelites have in arming themselves for this battle (1 Sam. 13:19–22):

No smith was to be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines were afraid that the Hebrews would make swords or spears. So all the Israelites

⁶ Peloponnesian War 1:22, Loeb Classics Library Translation.

⁷ It is not part of the earliest layers of Samuel (which we described in Chapter 2), though it is not as late as the Deuteronomistic layer either.

had to go down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, their mattocks, axes, and colters sharpened . . . Thus on the day of the battle, no sword or spear was to be found in the possession of any of the troops with Saul and Jonathan; only Saul and Jonathan had them.⁸

In sum, the Bible paints a picture of the period leading up to the monarchy as one of Philistine dominance, with Israelites living in fear of them. Whether this picture is exaggerated or not, the archaeological landscape at least supports the description of Israelites in this period being both weaker than the mighty Philistines and excessively concerned with these more powerful and better-organized neighbors.

**Box: The Historicity of the Biblical Stories about
Pre-monarchic Israel: Circumcision and More**

Much of the information provided in the Bible about the pre-monarchic period is not historical. Some of it is clearly mythological (Samson's superpowers, the plagues caused by the Ark, etc.), some of it displays anachronism (the description of a "united" Israel in the time of Eli or Samuel), and some simply cannot be verified one way or another. (Was the priest of Shiloh named Eli? Did he adopt Samuel? Were his sons wicked?)

Nevertheless, the convergence of data with regard to both the diffuse nature of Israelite political organization and the Philistine power at the time does suggest that the information the Bible provides on this early period is not devoid of history. While the stories themselves are suspect, the information concerning the

⁸ It is not clear what type of monopoly the Philistines are envisioned here as having had. In the past, scholars suggested that they had a monopoly over the production of iron tools and that they brought this knowledge with them from their place of origins. See Muhly 1982. The claim that Philistines brought metallurgy, however, is not supported by archaeological evidence, nor is it even hinted in the text: iron is not mentioned, and the text discusses only sharpening of tools. For Iron Age metallurgy, see now Gottlieb 2010; Yahalom-Mack and Eliyau-Behar 2015.

Box: (cont.)

social and geopolitical structure of the late Iron I is consistent with the period's reality.

Moreover, some narratives simply could not have been composed much after the fact since, in the Iron IIB–IIC, things were so different it would be difficult to explain how an author composing a story from scratch then (let alone later) could possibly have gotten it right.

One example of an historical nugget imbedded in the pre-monarchic and earliest monarchic accounts has to do with the Bible's consistent claim that Philistines were uncircumcised.⁹ First, it is important to note that the Bible makes this claim about them exclusively in texts dealing with this early period.

Biblical allusions to the Philistines abound in reference to later periods, and they are often described in hostile terms, and yet not a single such text refers to them as uncircumcised. Even prophetic texts that rail against them do not use the term "uncircumcised" (Isa. 2:6; 9:12; 11:14; 14:29; Jer. 25:20; 47: 1–7; Ezek. 16:27, 57; 25:15–17; Amos 1:8; 6:2; 9:7; Obad. 1:19; Zeph. 2:5).

Contrast this with the stories about Philistines in the pre- and early-monarchic periods:

- Samson's parents complain that he is marrying a woman from among the "uncircumcised Philistines" (Judg. 14:3).
- Finding himself without water after defeating the Philistines, Samson complains to God, "Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" (Judg. 15:18)
- Encouraging his arms bearer to join him, Jonathan says, "Come, let us cross over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows" (1 Sam. 14:6).
- To trick David into endangering himself with constant war against the Philistines, Saul tells him that in order to marry his daughter Michal, he needs to bring him "100 Philistine fore-skins" (1 Sam. 18:25, 2 Sam. 3:14).

⁹ Faust 2015c and references.

Box: (cont.)

- When Saul decides on suicide, it is “lest the uncircumcised come upon me” (1 Sam. 31:4).
- David’s lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan decries how “the daughters of the uncircumcised” may express merriment over their deaths (2 Sam. 1:20).

That there is a great hostility between groups of circumcised and uncircumcised is hardly surprising; ethnographic evidence from Africa exemplifies the deep-seated fear that interactions between circumcised and uncircumcised men entail. Max Gluckman (1911–75), the noted anthropologist and the founder of the Manchester School, for example, conducted fieldwork among the uncircumcised Lozi in Zambia. He described his visit with a few Lozi attendants to the neighboring Wiko lodge. The Wiko were a circumcising group, and Gluckman detailed how “the men delighted in threatening my Lozi with ‘cutting,’ and told us stories on how they frightened Lozi intruders into tears.”¹⁰

But why is this motif such a dominant theme in stories set in this period, but entirely absent from descriptions of the Philistines set in later periods? The simplest explanation is that the Philistines started to circumcise in the Iron Age II, and thus the slur would no longer have been meaningful.

This fits well with the overall picture of change in Philistine culture. As we have seen in Chapters 5 and 7, during the tenth century, the Philistines stopped producing their Aegean-inspired pottery, reduced the amount of pork they consumed (in most sites), and generally acculturated within the Levantine environment. Beginning to circumcise would therefore have been par for the course.

This is in line with the admittedly limited, textual evidence we have about Philistine circumcision. An Egyptian source from the time of Merneptah (roughly 1200 BCE) omits the Philistines from

¹⁰ Gluckman 1949: 152.

Box: (cont.)

groups of Sea Peoples that do not have foreskins, implicitly suggesting that the Philistines were uncircumcised.

In contrast, the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus wrote in his *History* (book II: 104) that the inhabitants of Philistia (the Syrians in *Palestinae*) are circumcised, a practice they learned from the Egyptians. Whether the Egyptian connection has any actual basis, the fact that Herodotus includes this detail suggests that the Philistines did not always circumcise but that they later adopted the local tradition.

The biblical accounts are in line with these pieces of external evidence, and they fit hand in glove with the archaeological evidence about the transformations of Philistine culture in the tenth century – a point we will elaborate on later in this chapter. What we would like to stress here is that the biblical traditions pertaining to the times of Samson, Samuel, Saul, and David are unique in calling the Philistines by the pejorative “uncircumcised.” Should the texts have been “invented” later in the Iron II, how would the authors know to add this pejorative, which would have had no bearing on the Philistines known to Israelite or Judahite authors during that period?

Thus, whatever may or may not be true in the details of the stories themselves – and for stories like Samson, the answer is very little – they must originate in a period during which the Philistines were still uncircumcised or had just begun to circumcise.

Seren/Tyranus

Another historical nugget embedded in the account discussing Iron I Philistines is the biblical reference to “the five Philistine rulers” of Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza as *melekh* (king) or *seren*.¹¹ The former term is Hebrew and ubiquitous in the Bible, but the latter is apparently Indo-European, cognate to Greek “tyrannos” (from which the English “tyrant” derives).

¹¹ This was first suggested by Klostermann (1887: 17), and adopted by Albright (1951: 228), and many others, including (tentatively) the BDB and HALOT dictionaries (for Ugaritic, see Gordon 1954/5).

Box: (cont.)

The term *seren* appears only in Joshua, Judges, and 1 Samuel (1 Chron.) in the stories about Philistines up to the time of David. This is another piece of evidence that (1) it was during this period alone that the Philistines maintained their distinctiveness from the locals, which included use of their own Aegean language and writing, and (2) that some of the narratives must have been based on early traditions.¹²

Box: The Term “Hebrews”

The mirror image of the Israelites pejoratively calling the Philistines “uncircumcised” is the use of the term “Hebrews” (*ivrim*) for the Israelites, which, in the former prophets, appears eight times in the book of 1 Samuel and in no other place.¹³ Moreover, the term appears exclusively in stories that describe the antagonism between the Israelites and the Philistines: The battle of Ebenezer (4:6, 9), the rebellion of Saul and Jonathan (13:3, 7, 19, 14:11, 21), and David’s interaction with Achish, the king of Gath (29:3).

Many scholars believe the term is related to the Akkadian term *hapiru*, which refers to groups composed mostly of individuals who had to leave their original communities, who coalesced and created new bands in the fringes of the Levantine society. They are often described as brigands by the city folk. The root of the word may

¹² These join various other arguments raised for the existence of early traditions in parts of the biblical texts. These were based mostly on style and language and, more often than not, poetry was identified as incorporating the earliest traditions. See recently Smith 2014; Hendel and Joosten 2018; Rendsburg 2020.

¹³ The term does appear in the Joseph and exodus stories (Genesis and Exodus), both of which are set in Egypt, as well as in laws describing indentured servitude (Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah), and in the book of Jonah. A discussion of these texts would take us too far afield.

Box: (cont.)

derive from *'apar*, dust, referring to the dust that covered these refugees or social outcasts.¹⁴ The term usually serves a pejorative function. For example, in the Amarna letters (fourteenth century), Levantine kings are sometimes accused of joining the *hapi*ru or becoming one.

When placed in the mouth of Philistines speaking about Israelites, the echo also sounds pejorative. For instance, during Saul's rebellion (14:11), when Jonathan and his servant confront the Philistines: "The Philistines said, 'Look, some Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have been hiding.'" While it is quite certain that the quote is not historical, by using the term "Hebrews," the author is trying to express what the Israelites seemed like in the eyes of the Philistines in the pre-monarchic period: uncivilized rabble.

We remind the readers that the term is never used in texts pertaining to later periods, and that even in Samuel, the terms "Hebrews" and "uncircumcised" are used *only* in the Philistine versus Israel complex. This implies some knowledge of the special antagonism that existed between the groups in this period, which is borne out by the archaeological evidence regarding pottery and pork, suggesting that the texts are early, dating to when these cultural distinctions would have been active or at least remembered.

2 THE END OF THE ELEVENTH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE TENTH CENTURY: THE FORMATION OF THE MONARCHY. AND THE RISE OF SAUL

The Philistine pressure on the highlands had a profound influence on the Israelites, well beyond the ethnic traits discussed earlier. Beginning with the archaeological evidence (see Chapter 4), in the late Iron I, the well-organized Philistines encroached on the small and loosely connected

¹⁴ The issue is hotly debated, and see, for example, Bottéro 1954; Greenberg 1955; Na'aman 1986; Lemche 1992.

highland villagers. This could have been just the natural result of their continued expansion. Alternatively, Daniel Master, a professor of archaeology at Wheaton College, has suggested that the encroachment could have been in response to an economic/ecological crisis that forced the Philistines to find new food sources.¹⁵

Whatever the reason, this pressure had a profound impact on settlement patterns in the highlands, and most of the famous Iron I settlement villages such as Khirbet Raddana, Ai, Giloh, and Khirbet Za'akuka were abandoned during the Iron I, mainly toward its end.

In contrast, the small minority of excavated Iron I highland villages that continued into the Iron II grew, changed their character, and became towns – for example, Tell en-Nasbah (Mizpah). These two phenomena – the abandonment of most villages on one hand, and the expansion of others into more central sites on the other – are different facets of the same process: The population abandoned many villages and concentrated in a more limited set of settlements, which consequently became larger and better suited to face the Philistine pressure.

The strategy makes sense since small villages would be vulnerable to Philistine incursions, while central sites with larger populations would be much easier to defend. Such a process is common throughout history as a response to external threat, and it brings additional social and political changes, including the rise of centralized leadership and social hierarchy.

For example, in Chapter 4, we referred to such cases in the ancient Greek world and in southern Mexico, where such processes of abandonment and relocation also appear to be a result of significant external threats. This is what we see in the late Iron I in the highlands. The population responded to the Philistine threat by reorganizing itself both spatially, moving to larger and better defended locations, and socially, by organizing in larger groups of people.

This did not take place everywhere at once, as the highlands are not uniform. Understanding the settlement patterns in this region, therefore, helps explain why the process began where it did.

¹⁵ Master 2021.

The settlement in the Judean highlands was much sparser than in the north, and closer to the large and well-organized Philistine cities, thus making them especially vulnerable to Philistine incursions. And indeed the Philistines' encroachment into the highlands brought them first into contact with the sparsely settled Judean hill country. While dozens of settlements existed there, probably accompanied by pastoral groups, their sparseness prevented the villagers from practicing effective resistance, and they succumbed easily to Philistine dominance.

The farther north the Philistines pushed, however, the larger and denser were the communities they encountered, and this denser population could resist more effectively. This explains why the tipping point was in southern Samaria – also known as the land of Benjamin. This is where the encroaching Philistines first encountered dense Israelite settlement (Chapter 4).

We can identify this resistance archaeologically not only by the abandonment of villages, but also in the emergence of fortifications. The first Iron Age highland fortifications that we find were built in the region of Benjamin, including Tell el-Ful (biblical Gibeah), Tell en-Nasbeh (biblical Mizpah), perhaps Gibeon, and probably also Khirbet ed-Dawwarah. This last site is of special interest as it was built as a fortified settlement in the eastern, more arid part of the land of Benjamin.

While the other fortifications can be loosely associated with the process of resistance, Khirbet Dawwarra might offer a more nuanced story. Israel Finkelstein, who excavated the site in the 1980s, suggested at the time that the site was built in the more sparsely settled desert fringe of Benjamin in order to avoid detection by the Philistines, and it was fortified as part of the resistance to their domination.¹⁶ At the time, he even suggested that this might have been the Gilgal associated with the story of Saul and Samuel. Notably, the concentration of population in denser settlements led to drastic economic and social changes and to the development of leadership. This is the background or context for the emergence of Saul.

¹⁶ Finkelstein 1990: 202–205.

Box: When Did It All Happen? A Note on Chronology

When did all the events described in this chapter take place? The dating of David and Solomon to the tenth century is well secured on the basis of inner biblical chronology and the synchronization of its later – better established – part with other events (see Excursus 3.1).

Still, the regnal years of the kings discussed in this chapter are more problematic. As noted, the verse that detailed the regnal years of Saul is corrupted and gives us virtually no information (Saul certainly did not become king at the age of one, and two years is also not a reasonable length for his reign; some scholars guess it originally said twenty-two), while the regnal years ascribed to David and Solomon – forty years each – are typological and not historical. Assuming that the end of Solomon's reign can be dated to approximately 930 BCE,¹⁷ we can estimate – and this is only an estimation – that Saul reigned from some point toward the very end of the eleventh century into the early tenth. Something like 1010–980 would be a reasonable guess. David ruled from around 980–960/950 and Solomon was king from somewhere around the 950s to about 930. These dates are far from secure, so we prefer to discuss broader horizons and usually avoid using exact dates.

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The two main elements highlighted so far in this chapter – that Judah was too weak to stand up against the Philistines, and that the resistance began in the region of Benjamin – are clearly reflected in the biblical narratives, as is the important role of the Philistines themselves.

As already discussed, the Philistine domination and the inherent weakness of Judah are reflected in the Samson story, set in the pre-monarchic period. After Samson's decision to hide in Judah brings the

¹⁷ For example, Thiele 1951; Galil 1996. The exact year is not important for our purposes.

Philistines to attack the local population, the Judahites confront him and want him to surrender (Judg. 15:12–13).

The Judahites clearly consider Samson part of their group, despite his being from a different tribe (Dan), but they are petrified by the Philistines and feel that they have no choice but to do what the Philistines command or suffer the consequences.

While, as already noted, the Samson story cannot be considered historical, the author here correctly captures the plight of Judah in the late Iron I: The sparsely populated Judah would not have been in a position to begin the war against the Philistines, even if they would be the ones to benefit the most from the removal of the Philistine threat.

That the resistance of Benjamin was the turning point is also supported by the biblical text. The core Saul story – the history of Saul’s rise (see Chapter 2) – describes how Saul and his son Jonathan “rebel” against the Philistines (1 Sam. 13–14).¹⁸

Jonathan’s attack on the Philistines in Geba, a town in Benjamin, is followed by Saul blowing the ram’s horn in a call of war (1 Sam. 13:2). This kicks off the battle of Michmas, which Saul and Jonathan eventually win, though not with such a decisive victory that Israel becomes the dominant power. The summary statement at the end of 1 Samuel 14 says it clearly (v. 52): “There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul.”

Box: Saul and the Abandonment Phenomenon

The abandonment of villages in the late Iron Age I has played a prominent role in the archaeological discussion in this book. While archaeology is well suited to identify such processes, it is less suitable to identify events and individuals, which is why in Chapter 4 we did not ask who led this move away from villages to fortified sites.

Still, reading the core biblical texts about Saul’s personal history against the backdrop of the archaeological data shows a deep connection. According to the book of Samuel, Saul lived in Gibeah, which is

¹⁸ Wright 2014: 36, 52, 233n12.

Box: (cont.)

generally identified with Tell el-Ful, located about six kilometers north of biblical Jerusalem. And yet, in the story of the execution of Saul’s descendants, we are told that David gathers up the bones of Saul, Jonathan, and the other family members and buried them “in Zela, in the territory of Benjamin, in the tomb of his father Kish” (2 Sam. 21:14). We don’t know where exactly Zela was located; apparently it was a small village of little importance, whose location has been lost.¹⁹

Wherever it was, being buried with one’s ancestors was a common practice in biblical times. What stands out in this story is that although Saul’s family tomb was located in Zela, clearly his ancestral home, he himself lived in Gibeah.

While we cannot be certain that the information about Gibeah and Zela is accurate, and even if it is, why Saul’s family left Zela for Gibeah, a likely explanation is that this was part of the village abandonment phenomena. Saul’s family left Zela, along with many others, as a result of the security problems caused by the Philistine raids, and moved to one of the central, settlements.

AN “AGENT” OR CHARISMATIC LEADER

While we cannot directly support the existence of an individual by the name of Saul at the time, it is inevitable that charismatic leaders – what anthropologists and sociologists call “agents” – were involved in resisting Philistine domination; after all, the fight against the Philistines was not led by committees. Still, unlike the situation in completely prehistoric contexts, with the biblical evidence we are on a better footing.²⁰

The biblical narrative, which, in its greater outlines, corresponds with the archaeological data, calls the most important agent involved in the resistance to the Philistines “Saul.” While archaeology can neither confirm nor deny that the central leader of the resistance against the Philistines was named Saul, the material cultural evidence does allow us to speak about a “Saul-like” leader who must have been involved in resisting the Philistines

¹⁹ Demsky 1973; Ehrlich 1982. ²⁰ Compare Marcus and Flannery 1996: 158.

and consolidating the highlanders. And, for reasons discussed in what follows, we think it is likely that Saul was his real name.

The Bible describes Saul as a Benjaminite from the town of Gibeah (Tell el-Ful), meaning hill – later known as Gibeat-Shaul (Saul’s Hill). This is one of the aforementioned fortified sites in the region whence we would expect the first king to have come. Thus, while not suggesting that the biblical narratives about him are accurate, we tend to think that there was indeed a major leader by the name of Saul – a “king” in the area of Benjamin.

Box: Everyone Wants to Be Like Saul

A subtle piece of evidence for the central role Saul played in Israelite history, and therefore for the likelihood that he is a real figure, is the attempts other biblical characters make to be like him in some way. A telling instance of this is how, in several spots, the book of Samuel attempts to cast Samuel as a prefiguration of Saul.²¹ For example, the depiction of Samuel in 1 Samuel 8 and 12 (the later of the two Saul-and-David sagas) casts Samuel as the leader of all Israel when he anoints Saul.

The subtlest but starkest way that the Samuel traditions insert themselves into Saul’s domain is in the story of Samuel’s rout of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7, following which Samuel sets up a commemorative stone.²² The story concludes (1 Sam. 7:13–14):

²¹ Milstein (2016: 185–189) speculates that the authors of Samuel actually reappropriated Saul’s birth story and gave it to Samuel. Among other things, she notes that the homily on the name of Samuel – “I borrowed (*she’iltiv*) him from God” (1 Sam. 1:20) – doesn’t really explain the name Samuel (Shmu’el, probably “Name of El”), but that of Saul (the name Sha’ul [Saul] means “borrowed” in Hebrew), and that this play on words is repeated multiple times in Hannah’s message to Eli when dropping off the boy (1 Sam. 1:27–28).

²² This story is clearly built upon that of 1 Samuel 4, in which an Israelite army, led by the two sons of Eli, lose the battle of Even-haezer. Here, the Israelites are led by Samuel and win.

Box: (cont.)

The Philistines were humbled and did not invade the territory of Israel again; and the hand of the LORD was set against the Philistines as long as Samuel lived. The towns which the Philistines had taken from Israel, from Ekron to Gath, were restored to Israel; Israel recovered all her territory from the Philistines. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites.

It is impossible to read the story of Saul's rise against this backdrop. If all the days of Samuel the Philistines were in retreat, why would Saul and Jonathan need to rebel?

The story in 1 Samuel 7 is a fictive account meant to communicate the author's belief that Samuel was greater than both the house of Eli and the house of Saul. Its very point is to undercut Saul's accomplishments by portraying a history in which the Israelites already dominated the Philistines before Saul ever arrived on the scene, something that contradicts the spirit of the book.²³

This account of Samuel's successful battle is not historical, of course. The historical Samuel, whoever he may have been, was most likely not a political leader but a wandering prophet and holy man – as is expected given the reality in the Iron I (see Chapter 4) and as he is in fact described in the older Saul-and-David saga (e.g., 1 Samuel 9–10). In inflating the importance of their own hero, the pro-Samuel scribes were aiming their pens against Saul and his legacy when writing about Samuel.²⁴

Another Ephraimite leader whose story mimics Saul's in some respects is Joshua. This ancient warrior battles Amalekites (Exod. 17) as Saul did, honors Israel's alliance with the Gibeonites (Josh. 10), in

²³ Similarly, Samuel is added artificially into the story of Saul's spontaneous reaction to Ammon's attack on Jabesh-gilead (v. 7). This is the only mention of Samuel in the war account and is an obvious gloss designed to put Samuel in a story that originally has Saul as a self-made leader.

²⁴ The same is true of the insertion into the battle account in 1 Samuel 13 (vv. 8–15), which explains both why Saul's dynasty will not succeed and why Samuel was not part of the battle (he would have been there but for Saul's sin).

Box: (cont.)

contrast to Saul who violates it, and establishes the presence of an Israelite polity in the region well before Saul was even born.²⁵ What thin historical basis the Joshua stories may have is unclear.²⁶ But the attempt to have him outdo Saul underscores how, for scribes who wished to paint their heroes in the colors of Israel's greatest leader, Saul was the one to beat (David's annexation of Saul's success in the Elah Valley, discussed later in this chapter, is another example).

THE BRUTAL CREATION OF SAUL'S KINGDOM

Many of the stories about Saul are historically suspect. Still, a number of narratives – even if they are not accurate – might teach us about the process through which Saul consolidated his rule.

The stories about the Gibeonites and their relationship to Israel are bewildering. They lived in an extensive part of the Benjaminite inheritance, yet they are described as Canaanites. Joshua is said to have made a treaty with them – although it is achieved under false pretenses (Josh. 9) – and later honors that treaty. Saul, by contrast, is described as massacring them.

The story of Saul's massacre itself is lost, but it is referenced parenthetically in 2 Samuel 21, which tells of a famine in the time of King David. As the famine drags on, David learns from the prophet Gad that it is a divine punishment for Saul's having slaughtered the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:2). To appease the Gibeonites, David executes all of Saul's sons and grandsons (except Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son).

Clearly, if the story has any historical basis, David is making opportunistic use of the famine to rid himself of competitors. Putting aside David's motivations, however, the reference to Saul's massacre is intriguing, as it gives us a glimpse into the conditions of the highlands during the period in which the Israelite villagers consolidated into a kingdom.

This is a period in which, facing the Philistine threat and the growing social complexity, various forces competed for control over the nascent highland polity that emerged in the region of Benjamin. This likely

²⁵ Farber 2016: 109–118. ²⁶ Farber 2010; Farber and Wright 2018.

included a brutal battle between different groups or lineages competing for power, each with its own leader, with Saul emerging as victor. Such a process is always accompanied by the creation of real boundaries between “us” and “them,” which is then described along often fictive bloodlines.

The defeated Gibeonites were painted as non-Israelites, although one might suspect that until then, the boundaries were much more flexible, and that, in other circumstances, they might have been described as Israelites or becoming such.

It is very possible that the story about Saul’s killing of the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:6–23) – another settlement in the land of Benjamin – should be understood as part of the same battle for hegemony that was later woven into the flowing narrative to incorporate David.

SAUL ON THE OFFENSE

Saul’s rule as portrayed in the Bible is full of battles and family drama. Such details are not likely to find corroboration in material finds. Certainly, the abandonment and fortification of central sites mentioned earlier are evidence of successful resistance, but it is not clear-cut as to where Saul fits into this process. On one hand, he may have been a leading factor in the fortification of Israelite towns; on the other hand, he may only have taken power at the tail end of this phenomenon.

Resisting the Philistines was a long process, and other agents were almost certainly involved. While we suggested that Khirbet ed-Dawwara might have been connected with this resistance, another site that can probably be associated with Saul more directly is the well-known archaeological site of Khirbet Qeiyafa, which made headlines when it was excavated in 2007–13 by Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, in cooperation with other colleagues (see Chapter 6).

Erected by the Elah Valley, outside of Benjaminite territory and near Judah’s western frontier, Khirbet Qeiyafa is dated to around the same time as – likely a drop later than – Khirbet ed-Dawwara. The book of Samuel describes Saul fighting a battle in this very region (on the battle of Efes-dammim, see later in this chapter).

It would seem that, following his successful stand against Philistine incursions into the hill country, and after consolidating his rule in the Benjamin area, Saul headed south, expanding his realm into the sparsely settled area of Judah. The establishment of the fortified site of Qeiyafa would have been a key part of his strategy here.

Notably, Qeiyafa is located not in the sparsely settled Judean hill country, but in the virtually empty territory of the Shephelah. In the Iron Age I, most of the Shephelah was a kind of no-man's-land, a border zone between the Israelite highlands and the Philistine coast, with only a string of small Canaanite villages mostly on its eastern edge (and with probably some pastoral groups exploiting the area), just below the highlands (see box "David's Dash through an Empty Shephelah"). Why establish a fortified settlement there?

KHIRBET QEYAF: A BULWARK AGAINST DAVID? Kh. Qeiyafa is a well-fortified settlement located on a small hill near the bed of the Elah Valley (Chapter 6). Two locations in the vicinity are much higher and dominate a larger swath of territory. One is Tel Yarmut, two kilometers to the northeast, which was the location of a small Canaanite village. The other, more important location is Tel Azekah, two kilometers to the west, which was unsettled at the time. Either of these sites would have been a more strategic location than Khirbet Qeiyafa. Why choose such a low-lying hill with such limited strategic value?

One of the main features of Qeiyafa is that it is not especially dominant. It is lower than the Azekah ridge, which blocks the sight lines between Qeiyafa and Philistine Gath. In other words, you can't see Gath from Qeiyafa and, more importantly, you can't see Qeiyafa from Gath (Figure 30, and see also Figure 13)!

While common wisdom associates its construction with the fight against the Philistines, the "invisibility" and lack of strategic value as compared to Azekah argues against this commonsense interpretation.

It thus seems unlikely that it was built to establish Israelite dominance over this part of the Shephelah, facing Gath, or even as a message aimed at the Philistines. If anything, the modest choice of location would have sent a message of non-aggressiveness against Gath.



Figure 30 The view from Khirbet Qeiyafa to the west. The Tel Azeka ridge blocks visibility toward Gath, which lies on the lower hills beyond (see also Figure 13) (photographed by Avraham Faust).

In modern terms, we could say that Qeiyafa's nonstrategic placement was not a bug but a feature. Clearly, the construction of this fortified town was an attempt to put a foothold in the empty Shephelah, perhaps also with the Philistines in mind, but this would not have been Saul's main target. Instead, we suggest a different target.

As the Shephelah was only thinly settled in the Iron I, the area would have been ideal for renegades to hide. While Qeiyafa does not threaten Gath, it blocks access to Gath and the coastal plain by anyone in the vicinity of Adullam – identified with Kh. esh-Sheikh Madkour – which is located at the uppermost part of the long and wide Elah Valley. Notably, Adullam is the very area the Bible describes as David's base as a brigand leader.

In other words, Qeiyafa may have been Saul's attempt to establish dominance in the region by controlling the movement of roving gangs such as David's. Such a possibility sheds new light on the biblical account of Saul's pursuit of David and might explain why David rushed to find refuge with the Philistines.

BACK TO THE BIBLE: DAVID'S GANG AS A THREAT TO SAUL'S RULE OVER JUDAH AND THE DAVID–SAUL RELATIONSHIP

The stories of Saul's chasing David in the Bible are all written from David's point of view, according to which Saul pursues David because Saul is mad with jealousy and/or paranoia. Throughout these accounts, we hear about Judahite locals tipping Saul off as to David's whereabouts.

In one of the sagas, following David's successful battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 23:7): "Saul was told that David had come to Keilah, and Saul thought, 'God has delivered him into my hands, for he has shut himself in by entering a town with gates and bars.'" David realizes that the citizens of Keilah – identified with Kh. Qeila²⁷ – will turn him over to Saul, so he returns to the wilderness where Saul can't find him. This is followed by a detailed story of Saul's pursuit of David through the Judean wilderness, in which Saul keeps receiving tips about David's whereabouts from local Judahites (this is repeated in both sagas).

Why is Saul chasing David and why do the locals keep turning David in? Putting aside the obviously pro-David spin that Saul was mad and jealous of David's success (more later in this chapter), a simpler option presents itself: David's band is a threat to Saul's attempt to extend his new kingdom southward.

Locals who wished to be under the protection of this new kingdom, and not subject to the whim of a local warlord, try to help Saul catch David. Moreover, as we see in the story of Nabal the Carmelite – one of the earliest stories of the history of David's rise (1 Sam. 25) – David runs a sort of a local protection racket and is willing to resort to violence if money isn't paid. It is not surprising that many locals would have preferred orderly rule under Saul.

If we are correct that part of the reason Qeiyafa was established was to deal with local warlords like David, we can see that the Bible's description of the animosity between David and Saul reflects something quite real. This explains the otherwise surprising fact that these stories are included in the Saul-and-David sagas at all.

²⁷ The site has not been excavated.

As noted, the sagas are written from the point of view of David. If the Saul-chasing-David stories were completely fictional, it would be odd for David's apologists to add him into Saul's story as a general or son-in-law and then, in the same breath, describe at length Saul's deep and abiding hatred for David. Why not simply make David a beloved son-in-law who inherits the kingdom after Saul and his sons are killed? Why do David's apologists have to include the unpleasant claim that Saul hated him and invent a set of stories in which Saul is chasing David all around the Judean wilderness, with the local population actually favoring Saul?

The clear implication is that the hatred of Saul for David is the one part of David's backstory with Saul that was true and well known. Therefore, the apologists needed to work hard to give a reason for this that would make Saul – not David! – look bad. Hence the stories about Saul's jealousy or paranoia.

As noted in Chapter 2, the oldest account of David has him beginning as a brigand leader with no direct connection to Saul.²⁸ Yet Saul took notice of David and his band when he expanded his nascent kingdom of Israel southward and tried to bring order to this Wild West-like territory. In short, David's time on the run from Saul is based on a historical core, the material remains of which we see in Khirbet Qeiyafa.²⁹

**Box: David's Dash through an Empty Shephelah: Another
Historical Kernel to the Stories**

The geography of David's escape from Saul also supports the existence of a historical core to the narrative. The story, which exists in parallel versions in both Saul-and-David sagas, contains a subtle clue to the ancient setting in which it must have been composed.

²⁸ Wright 2014.

²⁹ For a different theory for the animosity between Saul and David, based on the similarity between their wives' names (Ahinoam), see Baden 2013: 78–80, 178–181.

Box: (cont.)

In one of the sagas, David runs away from Saul's service, leaving the region of Benjamin and heading south into his home territory. After a failed attempt to find refuge in Gath, David heads to a cave near the town (village?) of Adullam in the Shephelah.³⁰ He then moves to the territory of Judah proper, and, with the exception of the battle near Keilah – another village on the border of the highlands and the Shephelah – all the wandering is in the highlands. In the other saga, after David becomes a vassal of Gath, he is given a fiefdom in the town (village?) of Ziklag, a border settlement far to the south and apparently not in the Shephelah.

Notably, the description of the Shephelah here contains only a couple of small towns (Keilah and Adullam, about four kilometers apart), and a cave, all located near the meeting place between the highlands and the Shephelah (in or near the region known as the trough valley). From this easternmost part of the Shephelah, all the way to Gath, on the border of the coastal plain, no settlements are mentioned, including the major cities that would become dominant in the Judean Shephelah in the Iron IIA, such as Lachish, Libnah, Azekah, Maresha, and others. Instead, David moves freely from the highland's slopes to the coastal plain (Gath) through ostensibly empty tracts of land.³¹

If the core of the David-running-from-Saul stories dates back to the time of David or shortly thereafter, then this empty Shephelah fits perfectly. But if the story was first written centuries later, it is strange that the authors of both sagas mention only small unimportant villages in the east (Keilah and Adullam) and leave out any reference to sites in the main part of the Shephelah, especially

³⁰ The site is unexcavated.

³¹ Finkelstein (2013a) correctly identified the emptiness of the Shephelah, but he misdated sites (like Lachish V) to the ninth century, pushing the story to this era (for Lachish, see recently Kang, Chang, and Garfinkel 2023).

Box: (cont.)

the large major cities that would have existed in the time of the author, like Lachish or Azekah.³² The simple explanation is that when the core of the story was composed, the Shephelah had no such cities. This is yet another indication for the early date of the initial story.

DAVID, GATH, AND QEIYafa. Saul's building of Qeiyafa, thus taking effective control over the road that ran along the Elah Valley, may be what forced David to find refuge at Gath, moving his base of action to Ziklag. David's affiliation with Gath is something which both versions of the Saul-and-David saga feel the need to explain.³³

One version (1 Sam. 21:11–16) admits that the incident occurred but denies that David actually ever served Achish, the king of Gath. Instead, once David arrives in Gath, the king's advisers recognize him as an enemy, and pretending to be crazy, David is kicked out as harmless. In the other version (27:1–28:2), David does nominally serve Achish, but he is only *pretending* to be loyal to the Philistines. Really, he is protecting Judahites and raiding their neighbors and enemies.

Such protests can probably be dismissed as spin, but the fact that both versions feel the need to explain *why* David takes refuge with Achish and how that doesn't actually make him a traitor strongly implies that David's relationship with Achish is historical, and so is the Bible's core explanation of David's defection: to protect himself from Saul.

One way or the other, it appears as if Saul's incursion into the Shephelah was, partially at least, aimed against brigand groups like David's and that he

³² Surprisingly, Oeming (2021: 3–4) argues that the story assumes that Azekah existed at the time, because of 1 Samuel 17:1. This, however, represents a misunderstanding of the reference since Azekah is mentioned as a mere geographical reference point. That settlement names are preserved and used even when the settlements do not exist is one of the most basic tenets in historical geography (e.g., Aharoni 1979a, and practically all the literature on the historical geography of the region).

³³ Chapter 2.

was successful. David had to leave his comfort zone in the trough valley and move to Philistine territory.

THE BATTLE OF EFES-DAMMIM. Saul's attempt to communicate nonaggression to Gath while taking control of the region may have fallen flat. The Bible describes a battle between Saul and the Philistines at a place with the strange toponym of Efes-dammim, meaning "no blood" – perhaps the site was renamed after Israel's victory. The core of the story (1 Sam. 17:1–2, 52) reads:

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Efes-dammim. Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines . . . The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

That such a battle took place, and that Saul won, would mean that, at least at first, his foray into Judah and the Shephelah was more successful than even he had expected, which makes what happened to this battle account in the Bible much starker.

THE STORY OF GOLIATH: TAKING OVER SAUL'S LEGACY. The reader will note that we have skipped verses 3–51 in this account. Although this is the bulk of the account, these verses are a later insertion, as they interrupt the battle scene with the famous story of David and Goliath.³⁴ This is a classic example of what David's scribes did to Saul's legacy.

According to this addition, after the two armies encamped opposite each other (verse 2), they freeze their immanent battle plans when the Philistines

³⁴ As noted in Chapter 2, the David-and-Goliath story is riddled with inconsistencies, and the Masoretic version is much longer than the Septuagint version. Thus many scholars suggest that at least parts of the story were added later. What we are suggesting is that, however this narrative was composed over time, the account began as a supplement, revising the core text about Saul's battle.

send an enormous warrior forth into the valley between the armies to challenge an Israelite opponent to single combat (1 Sam. 17:8–9, 11):

He stopped and called out to the ranks of Israel and he said to them, “Why should you come out to engage in battle? . . . Choose one of your men and let him come down against me. If he bests me in combat and kills me, we will become your slaves; but if I best him and kill him, you shall be our slaves and serve us.” . . . When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and terror-stricken.

Goliath’s demand to fight Israel’s greatest warrior may have been phrased as a subtle challenge to Saul himself, who is literally “head and shoulders above all others” (1 Sam. 9:2, 10:23). And yet Saul never volunteers, nor do any of his warriors; only David, who is not yet part of Saul’s army, takes up the challenge, and that when he is still a lad! By presenting the large warrior-king Saul as petrified and the lad David as brave, the story aggrandizes David and undermines Saul at the same time.

Moreover, the entire narrative undercuts Saul’s achievement in the battle of Efes-dammim. In context, the killing of Goliath is little more than a dramatic if irrelevant sideshow since the battle is fought anyway – even though, according to the deal between Israel and the Philistines, it should not have been. At the same time, such a drama is more memorable than yet another battle, and thus Saul’s defeat of the Philistines and their retreat from Judahite territory is all but forgotten in the drama of the single combat between lad and giant.

The scribes who wrote this story and inserted it into the preexisting account of the battle of Efes-dammim were, in fact, reworking a much briefer and more forgettable version of the killing of Goliath, preserved in the appendix on David’s early battles with the Philistines, at the end of Samuel (2 Sam. 21:9):³⁵ “Again there was fighting with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, whose spear had a shaft like a weaver’s bar.”

³⁵ We say “scribes” (rather than “scribe”) because this ostensibly simple and memorable story has an extraordinarily complex developmental history and the version in the MT is really a splicing of two different versions of the story. (The Greek Septuagint preserves a shorter tale with only one of these alternative versions.) See discussion in Barthélemy et al. 1986; compare Johnson 2015.

Here we have a minor story of bravery tucked into a group of stories about feats of battle against Philistines accomplished by David's men. As Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman have noted – and here we are in agreement with them – it makes little sense to assume that a scribe would have the gall to take a story about the great hero David killing Goliath and transfer it to an unknown person like Elhanan.³⁶ Instead, the authors of this narrative strand lifted the story of the killing of Goliath from Elhanan and with great embellishments used it as the opening to one of the Saul-and-David sagas.

This newly reworked story cuts into the originally independent account of the battle, which, when read independently of the Goliath story, is about what we would expect length- and detail-wise of a biblical battle story – all of David's battles with the Philistines in 2 Samuel (5:17–25, 8:1) read this way. Supplementing it with the Goliath story, however, deemphasizes Saul's role in freeing Judah from the Philistines and places David squarely in the middle of the action in this all-important first step toward Judean independence. We must stress that this addition was inserted quite early, most likely by David's scribes. Indeed, Frank Polak notes that most of the story is written in what he calls the early lean unencumbered style, meaning that any additions were done at a very early stage.³⁷ The original story, however, briefly tells us that Saul defeated the Philistines and probably freed Judah.

THE DEATH OF SAUL IN THE BIBLE AND THE FALL OF QEIYafa.

Saul apparently had many successes, both in the Benjamin region and in Judah. The core Saul story offers what is likely an exaggerated evaluation of his success, which tellingly depicts his entire reign as one battle after another (1 Sam. 14:47–48):

After Saul had secured his kingship over Israel, he waged war on every side against all his enemies: against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the Philistines, and the kings of Zobah; and wherever he turned he worsted them.³⁸ He was triumphant, defeating the Amalekites and saving Israel from those who plundered it.

³⁶ Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 195–196. ³⁷ Polak 2010: 55–56.

³⁸ This verse may be the one example of Saul's chroniclers mimicking David's triumphs.

And yet Saul was not destined to be the leader who established Israel as a dominant power in the region. Instead, the book of Samuel describes a major battle between Saul's forces and the Philistines. The battle takes place by Mount Gilboa, on the northern part of the Samarian highlands, bordering on the Jezreel Valley (1 Sam. 28:4, 29:1, 31:1).

The background to the battle is not clear. Some commentators suggest that the Philistines were on the offense, whereas other suggest that, having consolidated his hold on the Samarian and Judean highlands, Saul turned his face northward.³⁹ One way or the other, Saul was outside his comfort zone and utterly defeated (1 Sam. 31:1–4):

The Philistines attacked Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and many fell on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines pursued Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua, sons of Saul. The battle raged around Saul, and some of the archers hit him, and he was severely wounded . . . Saul said to his arms-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, so that the uncircumcised may not run me through and make sport of me." But his arms-bearer, in his great awe, refused; whereupon Saul grasped the sword and fell upon it.

The story ends with the Philistines coming upon the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, which they then take to Beth-Shean and impale upon the city walls. While again, this is not something that can be discerned in the archaeological record, this event (or such an event, if Saul died in another campaign) fits with the fact that Khirbet Qeiyafa was destroyed and abandoned soon after it was built. In other words, the building of the site reflects a surge in Saul's power, and its destruction was a setback in the power relations between the Israelites and the Philistines upon the death of Israel's first charismatic king.

³⁹ Compare Noth 1960: 177–178; Bright 1972: 190; Oded 1984: 114.

Box: Did Saul Make It Down to the Beersheba Valley?

The book of Samuel describes Saul's conquest of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:5–8): "Saul came to the city of the Amalekites and lay in wait in the valley . . . Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword." We do not know where this city of Amalek is. In the context of Saul's battles in the Samarian hills, one possibility is that it was somewhere in this region. There is support for such a possibility in the book of Judges, in which the Ephraimites are said to have "their roots in Amalek" (Judg. 5:14), and where the judge Abdon is said to have been buried "on the hill of the Amalekites" (Judg. 12:15).

Most scholars, however, on the basis of the majority of the relevant biblical traditions (e.g., Num. 13–14; 1 Sam. 30), place the Amalekites, and by extension the city of Amalek, in the Negev. This is further supported by the reference to Saul chasing the Amalekites as far south as Havilah and Shur – that is, in the direction of the Sinai Peninsula. Some, moreover, have suggested identifying this city with Tel Masos in the Beersheba Valley.⁴⁰

The large settlement of Tel Masos (level II) was destroyed in the first half of the tenth century, and some scholars suggested that it was destroyed by King Saul within the framework of the aforementioned battle. Such an expansion would fit with the other hints about the expansion of Saul to the territory of Judah, and might represent the apex of Saul's southward expansion. Perhaps it could be understood as an attempt to benefit from the lucrative trade in copper and incense in the Beersheba–Arad Valley.

Interestingly, as part of the campaign against the Amalekites, Saul is described as treating the Kenites differently, as he warns them to leave the city of Amalek before he destroys it (v. 5). "Saul said to the

⁴⁰ For example, Kochavi 1984: 46, and following him others.

Box: (cont.)

Kenites, ‘Go! Leave! Withdraw from among the Amalekites, or I will destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.’ So the Kenites withdrew from the Amalekites.”

Scholars connect this with the tradition in the book of Judges (Judg. 1:16): “The descendants of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, went up with the Judahites from the City of Palms to the wilderness of Judah; and they went and settled among the Amalekites (or ‘among the people’) in the Negeb of Arad.”⁴¹ Thus the destruction of Tel Masos II and the approximate flourish of other sites in the region, described in Chapter 9, could be a result of exactly this policy, in which those Saul considered allies or culturally similar to Israel (the Kenites in this case) were incorporated into the polity, while those who were not (the Amalekites in this case) were rooted out.

The difficulty with this suggestion is that we lack the chronological resolution to differentiate this destruction from other Iron IIA destructions, which took place later than Saul – for example, in the time of David. Thus, despite the attractiveness of connecting this destruction to Saul, we prefer to be cautious and at this stage treat the destruction and abandonment of Tel Masos and its satellites as likely part of the larger expansion that took place a generation later.

3 BEGINNING—MID TENTH CENTURY: DAVID, EXPANSION, AND THE FORMATION OF A MINI-EMPIRE

From a broad geopolitical perspective, the tenth century is characterized by:

- (1) Accelerating recovery from the economic nadir brought about by the collapse of the Late Bronze Age system in the twelfth century, the

⁴¹ The old Latin and some Greek manuscripts read “**Amalekite**,” whereas the Masoretic text reads just “*am*” (people), so the confusion here is understandable.

growth of maritime trade, and the reestablishment of trade routes that crossed the Land of Israel, many of which ended up in port cities.

- (2) The continued political weakness of the traditional centers of power, which exerted no influence over the region at this time.

From an archaeological perspective, the first half of the tenth century BCE in Israel is characterized by massive archaeological changes. Unlike the previous stage, the archaeological signatures here are abundant, and all of them point to the expansion of the highland polity, which we see as reflecting the consolidation of the monarchy.

MATERIAL CHANGES IN THE IRON AGE II

SECOND WAVE OF VILLAGE ABANDONMENT. If the previous phase was characterized by abandonment of villages in the highlands, the early decades of the Iron IIA are characterized by abandonment of villages in the rest of the country, including the excavated villages of Karmi'el, Ras-'Ali, Khirbet, 'Avot, Sasa, Tel Harashim, Qiryat Shemonah, Tel Wawiyat, Tel 'Ein Zippori, Ein el-Hilu, Qubur el-Walayda, Nahal Patish, the southern coastal plain *haserim*, Nahal Yatir, Tel Esdar, Khirbet Balu'a, Khirbet al-Mudayna al-'Aliya, Khirbet al Mudayna al-Mu'arradja, Abu al-Haraqa, Medeineh-Smakie, Lehun, and many others.

The only region in which some excavated villages continued to exist is the northern valleys. While it is likely archaeology will uncover isolated villages in other parts of the country that remained intact, the large number of excavations upon which we rely suggests that such discoveries are not likely to change the overall pattern. Apparently, the new highland polity expanded and created havoc in the regions that surrounded its core, leading to these large-scale abandonments.

DESTRUCTION OF MANY CITIES. In parallel with the abandonment of so many villages in the early Iron IIA, many of the towns and cities were destroyed, fully or partially. This is true for all the territories into which the highland polity expanded, from the Galilee in the north to the Beersheba–Arad Valley in the south, including Megiddo, Yoqneam,

Beth-Shean, Abel Beth-Ma'achah, Kinrot, Tel Rekhesh, Gezer, Tel Qasile, Tel Masos II, and many others (Chapters 7–13). Many of the destroyed cities were later rebuilt (some perhaps only a bit later in the century), often following different outlines, which leads us to the next change.

CITIES REBUILT WITHOUT TEMPLES. When the cities destroyed in the early Iron IIA had temples, they were subsequently rebuilt without one – for example, in Megiddo, Beth-Shean, and Tel Qasile. Whatever the exact reason for this is, the practice is clear and signified who the new rulers were.

While this rebuilding should most probably be attributed to the next chronological stage and will be discussed in Section 4 of this chapter, we mention it now because it shows that these areas were conquered and assimilated into the new Israelite polity (Chapters 6–13).

DECLINE AND CHANGES IN PHILISTIA. While these changes took place throughout the country, each region experienced its own set of transformations. These will be summarized later, but here we would like to illustrate the dramatic changes by focusing on the Philistines, who were the major power in the Iron I, but whose role was drastically transformed in the early Iron IIA. Not only were virtually all the villages abandoned in Philistia, but at least two of the three excavated Iron I megacities, Ashkelon and Ekron, shrank in size.⁴² Ekron, for example, decreased from twenty hectares in the Iron I to four in the Iron IIA.

This was accompanied by drastic changes in material culture, like the cessation in the use of the Aegean-inspired pottery, the decrease in the consumption of pork, the adoption of local script, and more, indicating that the weakened Philistines ceased stressing their foreignness, probably as they stopped fighting for hegemony, and quite rapidly acculturated (this would also be when they started to circumcise).

⁴² Gath is an exception. Ashdod was small – that is, not a megacity – whereas Gaza was not excavated.

OTHER MATERIAL CHANGES. Another major cultural revolution in this period (tenth century) is the change in pottery forms and decoration, the disappearance of most regional traditions, and the growth of a more uniform ceramic horizon over much larger regions (see Chapter 5). The change was gradual, and while its development is another sign of the great transformation that occurred in this period and the growth of interconnectedness between regions, these changes seem to have peaked only a generation or two later, and will therefore be discussed in the next section.

THE HISTORICITY OF DAVID

From these archaeological observations, we can see that the nascent highland kingdom, which first consolidated in the Samarian highlands in the late Iron I, then expanded south into Judah, carried out a series of conquests during the Iron I–II transition, expanding in every direction, and forming what appears to be a mini-empire (more later). What can we say about the conqueror himself?

In the Bible, of course, the person is named: The conqueror was none other than David, whose colorful life and rule is detailed in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. But what can we say about this person historically?

We know that David was a real person, the founder of the dynasty that ruled from Jerusalem, since the kings of Judah are described as being from “the house of David” not only throughout the Bible, but also in two ancient inscriptions: the Tel Dan Inscription from Aram and the Mesha Inscription in Moab, both from the late ninth century.⁴³

While nothing is known about David as a person/character outside the Bible, considering the entire range of data (biblical, archaeological, and anthropological), we can cautiously talk about a brigand leader from the region of Judah who takes power over the nascent highland kingdom after a setback (the death of Saul) and proves himself a more successful military leader than his predecessor. David succeeds in creating an army capable not only of holding back the Philistines, but of defeating them and many other of Israel’s neighbors.

⁴³ For example, Biran and Naveh 1993; Lemaire 1994, and see Chapter 3.

HOW DID DAVID BECOME KING? ISRAEL'S CIVIL WAR

Anthropologically speaking, David appears to have been of a type with the conquerors – or agents – Kent Flannery describes (Chapter 14): a resourceful, charismatic, and ruthless leader able to take advantage of circumstances to create a rapidly expanding mini-empire. David's rise as a younger son of a moderately important family turned brigand leader and eventually conqueror is much like the story of the many conquerors Flannery surveys.

Archaeologically, we can't say more about David's ascent to power, but we can further isolate plausible specifics about David that seem to be in line with the broader archaeological-anthropological picture by delving into the biblical account with a historical-critical lens and identifying an early, plausible, narrative core.

The death of Saul did not lead to the disintegration of the nascent Israelite polity, though the destruction of Qeiyafa implies a short-term setback in the power relations between Israel and the Philistines. Saul's death, along with the deaths of his sons, would naturally leave a power vacuum. The biblical account presents us with two main contenders:

CONTENDER 1: ISH-BOSHETH, "SON OF SAUL." The first contender, who claimed continuity and therefore legitimacy, was Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. 2:8–10): "Abner son of Ner, Saul's army commander, had taken Ish-bosheth son of Saul and brought him across to Mahanaim and made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin – over all Israel. Ish-bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king of Israel, and he reigned two years." While the text claims that Ish-bosheth – his real name was Ish-baal – (see box "Was Ish-bosheth at Khirbet Qeiyafa?") – was Saul's son, no such person is listed in other places in Samuel describing Saul's family.⁴⁴ Moreover, it seems unlikely that Saul would have had a forty-year-old son, and that Jonathan, his eldest, was therefore, middle aged and Saul elderly. Instead, Ish-bosheth's claim to be Saul's son fits with what was common practice

⁴⁴ Ish-baal (1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39) means "a man of Baal," but the book of Samuel calls him Ish-bosheth ("a man of shame"), due to its discomfort with a theophoric name featuring the foreign deity Ba'al (Noth 1928; Garfinkel 2018, with references).

throughout history: for upstarts to claim family connection to previous kings where none existed or when the relations were relatively distant ones.⁴⁵

CONTENDER 2: DAVID. But Ish-bosheth was up against an opponent much more powerful than he. Even before Saul's death, David had been building his power base in Judah. The starkest example is in the story narrating how David's gang chased down the Amalekites who raided Ziklag. After dividing some of the spoils among his men (1 Sam. 30:26–31; our emphasis):

[H]e sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah and to his friends, saying, "This is a present for you from our spoil of the enemies of the LORD." He sent the spoil to the elders in Bethel, Ramoth-negeb, and Jattir; in Aroer, Siphmoth, and Eshtemoa; in Racal, in the towns of the Jerahmeelites, and in the towns of the Kenites; in Hormah, Bor-ashan, and Athach; and to those in Hebron – **all the places where David and his men had roamed.**

Sending out gifts was meant to solidify his position in the area of his operation and to secure loyalty or "friendship" as the receivers were now in his debt. This shows that David's sights were now on something much bigger than brigandage. When Saul died, David saw his opportunity, went to Hebron with his entourage, and settled there, then (2 Sam. 2:4): "The men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the House of Judah."

While the role of Judah as a tribe may be anachronistic, the core of the story appears early and plausible.⁴⁶ Taking control of Judah was only a stepping stone. Not long after, David wrests control of the rest of Israel from Ish-bosheth in a combination of military successes and political manipulation. The Bible's description of David (re)marrying Saul's daughter Michal at this stage makes great political sense (see box "David's Self-Legitimation").

David also wins over Abner, the enemy general, to his side. Although Abner is soon assassinated by David's chief general, Joab, David's apologists claim he had no part in that. This is followed by the assassination of

⁴⁵ While it is quite clear that Ish-baal was not Saul's son, it is possible that he was related, and hence felt his claim was legitimate, and perhaps this is also why Abner supported him (more below).

⁴⁶ We think that Judah as the name of a tribe (as opposed to a territory) becomes an entity only later (see also Leonard-Fleckman 2015, cf. Halpern 2001: 272–273).

Ish-bosheth himself; David's apologists claim he had no part in this either, though Ish-bosheth's head did end up in David's living room.

All these details belong to early strata in the books of Samuel, and, as we shall see, they appear to be manipulated to defend David. It is very unlikely that pro-Davidic sources would invent the accusations in the first place, and thus they were likely well known, and all David's apologetics could do was to spin the stories, suggesting that David was not the actual perpetrator. Regardless of the exact details, the overall process by which David captured the throne is clearly in line with similar historical episodes as outlined by Flannery.

Box: Was Ish-bosheth at Khirbet Qeiyafa?

Only rarely do we have an opportunity to associate names unearthed in excavations with actual biblical figures. Sometimes, we find a famous name that is almost certainly not a reference to the biblical figure. A good example is the name Jerubaa! unearthed in Kh. al-Ra'i, which is not likely to be associated with the biblical judge by that name (Gideon = Jerubaa!).⁴⁷ While the Iron I dating of the inscription makes the association tempting, the site and the biblical character are incompatible geographically.

The same applies, even if to a lesser extent, to Benaiah, recently discovered in Abel Beth-Ma'acah and dated to the Iron IIA.⁴⁸ Benaiah is mentioned as part of the military staff of David and then Solomon, but we have no reason to believe he would have been active so far north.

The case is rather different with Qeiyafa's Ish-baal, the real name of Ish-bosheth. As noted, the latter means "a man of humiliation" and is a pejorative name meant to deride the man as David's competitor, the god Baal, or both. His real name is preserved in 1 Chronicles (8:33).⁴⁹

When the Ishbaal inscription was published, several arguments were raised against identifying him with the biblical Ishbaal. First,

⁴⁷ Rollston et al. 2021. ⁴⁸ Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021.

⁴⁹ See Noth 1928; Garsiel 2016; Garfinkel 2018, and references.

Box: (cont.)

there may have been many individuals with this name, such that any association is speculative. Second, Kh. Qeiyafa is located in the territory of Judah, whereas Ishbaal's base was in Transjordanian Mahanaim, and he ruled only the north. Finally, as Moshe Garsiel, a Bible professor at Bar-Ilan University, noted, in the inscription, the name of the individual's father, or the founder of the lineage, is (B)da, whereas the king is the son of Saul.⁵⁰ Moreover, the jar lacks any royal reference.⁵¹ Garsiel therefore attempted to identify Ishbaal as one of David's men.

And yet these arguments assume that King David built Khirbet Qeiyafa after the death of Saul. In such a scenario, it would indeed be difficult to believe that Ishbaal would have a storage jar in his enemy's stronghold. But we have seen that the site was likely built by Saul and was destroyed by the Philistines before David became king.

The timing, therefore, works quite well. Moreover, as Ishbaal was not the son of Saul (as we argue earlier in this chapter), but a usurper (or perhaps a distant relative), then it seems likely that this man was an officer in Saul's army or at least part of Saul's administration. This might explain why Abner, Saul's general and cousin, supported him in the first place. We may therefore speculate that Ishbaal may have served in some capacity in Khirbet Qeiyafa, which would explain why a storage jar of his would have been found there.

**Box: What's in a Name? Ancient Names and the Dating
of the Narratives**

The name Ish-Baal, "a man of Baal," a theophoric name with the God Baal instead of YHWH or El, is very different from the typical biblical names. In this sense, it joins others, such as Jerubaal, and

⁵⁰ Garsiel (2016: 222) believes that the name of the father was Da and that the letter "b" stands for "ben" (i.e., son).

⁵¹ Garsiel 2016: 224.

Box: (cont.)

other non-Yahwistic names that are common in the books of Judges and Samuel,⁵² but rarely appear in books pertaining to later periods (e.g., Kings, the prophetic books, and more). As more inscriptions are discovered, we begin to see a pattern here, one that serves as another indication for the early date of much of the books of Samuel.

This is how noted epigrapher Christopher Rollston, along with Yosef Garfinkel, Kyle H. Keimer, Gillan Davis, and Saar Ganor, summarized the issue in their recent article, in which they presented the Jerubba'al inscription:⁵³

The personal name Jerubba'al joins the 'Išba'al inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa and the Ba'al inscription from Beth-Shemesh. While theophoric names with the element ba'al occur in Judah in both the biblical tradition and epigraphic sources of the eleventh–tenth centuries BCE, this element disappears from the biblical text and from the epigraphic record between the ninth and sixth centuries BCE. The chronological correlation between the biblical tradition and ancient Judean inscriptions indicates that the biblical text preserves authentic Judean onomastic traditions.

To this we can add the aforementioned reference to Benaiah. This name too appears in the narratives on the tenth century BCE, but unlike Ishbaal and Jerubaal, the theophoric component is Yahwistic and thus fits also with the later period. The bottom line is that we see a correspondence between the unique horizon of biblical names attributed to this era, and those found in the excavation of Iron IIA sites – especially its earlier phase.

⁵² See, for example, many names in 2 Samuel 23. ⁵³ Rollston et al. 2021.

Box: David's Self-Legitimization

Since David captured the throne and was not Saul's son, he had a strong need for legitimation. Moreover, he had to counter claims that he hurt the "real" king and benefited from his death, or even secretly contributed to his demise. This was not the image David wished to project. Instead, part of David's strategy in taking power was connecting himself with Saul while explaining away the antagonistic relationship that existed between the two as Saul's fault.

David began as a self-made, band-of-outlaws leader, and his connections with Saul, which stand at the heart of David's legitimation efforts, are difficult to assess. We have seen in Chapter 2 that the biblical narratives contain many contradictory claims, and the biblical text cannot simply be accepted as historical. This goes especially for the introductory material, which is the material that ancient scribes would most often add to preexisting accounts.

In our case, it is possible that both colorful accounts of David meeting Saul are fictional and that David and Saul had no personal contacts. The idea of David and Michal having been already married when David was younger may be later spin by David's apologists. Instead, upon becoming king of all Israel, he may simply have taken her away from her husband, marrying her to legitimize his claims to the crown.

Even so, it is possible that Saul and David were in contact, especially once Saul solidified his hold on the highlands of southern Samaria and headed south. Given the limited size of the highlands and the closeness of the two men's regions of activity – Saul's hometown of Gibeah and David's hometown of Bethlehem are only about thirteen kilometers apart as the crow flies – contact between the two is probably expected. Indeed, in the story of David and Goliath, when Saul asks David whose son he is, David answers, "I am the son of your servant, Jesse of Bethlehem" (1 Sam. 17:58). The text never clarifies whether Saul knows Jesse, but the point is that senior members of important lineages in the region would often know each other or at least know of each other.

Box: (cont.)

David's role as a leader in the southern periphery of Saul's emerging polity would have been reason enough for an alliance, and it is even possible that Saul would have offered one of his daughters to David to solidify an alliance between them. Such a political marriage was common practice. If there had been an alliance that Saul perceived David as having broken, it would give the animosity we find in the stories a personal edge. Whatever the real relations between Saul and David were, it is clear that the stories were heavily edited, and even if the men were personally acquainted, the stories up the level of familiarity significantly.

Let's begin with the nature of the contacts between the two men – the sagas describe David as:

- Saul's personal musician.
- Saul's arms-bearer.
- Engaged to Saul's daughter Merav.
- Married to Saul's daughter Michal.
- Best friends with Saul's son Jonathan.
- Eating family meals with Saul and Jonathan.
- Saving Saul's army and reputation by killing Goliath.
- Saul's greatest warrior, killing many Philistines.

At the same time, the stories aim to legitimize and explain all of David's actions. Thus the negatives aspects of David's relationship with Saul, which are likely accurate, are recast to improve David's image.

This is clear from how both Saul-and-David sagas end the description of Saul chasing David (1 Sam. 23:19–24:22; 1 Sam. 26) with the same type of scene: David could have killed Saul, but he doesn't, and the latter admits that David was right.

David graciously sparing Saul's life and Saul, with tears in his eyes, forgiving David is almost certainly fanciful, but the message is that Saul's attempts to capture David were illegitimate, that Saul himself admitted this in the end, and he even accepted the

Box: (cont.)

worthiness of David. Moreover, these stories emphasize that David never hurt Saul even when he had the opportunity to do so.

This fits with other aspects of the pro-David spin in the Saul-and-David sagas that seem to be covering unpleasant truths:⁵⁴

- Yes, David was on the side of Saul's enemy, Achish the king of Gath, but he was only pretending to be on Gath's side. Actually, he was nowhere near the site of battle and was protecting Judahite cities from Amalekite raiders (killing Amalekites just like Saul did, a kingly act).
- Yes, David ended up with Saul's crown in a bag after Saul was killed in battle, but this is because the Amalekite man who brought it to him didn't realize how much David loved Saul, which is why David had the man executed. Anyway, David wrote a beautiful poem to commemorate the heroism of Saul and Jonathan, proving his loyalty.
- Yes, David executed virtually all of Saul's descendants, but YHWH made him do this because of Saul's sinful killing of the Gibeonites. Moreover, David kept Jonathan's son Mephibosheth alive, so we see he is loyal.

Regardless of the real nature of the relations between the two men, David's apologists felt the need to increase or invent his role in Saul's story, spinning any negative interactions between them as not David's fault.

DAVID CONQUERS JERUSALEM

Soon after David moves from being king of only the south to king of "all" Israel, we are informed that he conquers Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6–10), a city just north of the territory he ruled from Hebron. Given Jerusalem's patchy archaeological record (see Chapter 3), we know very little about this episode outside the detailed, but very problematic biblical descriptions.

⁵⁴ Compare with the stories about Shaka's missing the battle in which Dingiswayo died (Chapter 14).

According to the book of Samuel, until David conquered it, Jerusalem had been an enclave of a non-Israelite group called the Jebusites.⁵⁵ Notably, this city is near Gibeah of Saul, and yet Saul had not conquered it. David's choice of Jerusalem as the new capital of a "united" Israel would have made his power in comparison to that of Saul conspicuous. Conquering the city would also enable a better unification of the separate highland groups, as it was near territory Saul ruled from, as opposed to deep in David's own territory as Hebron was, and it did not have a history of being part of any particular tribe's holdings.

2 Samuel 5:6–9, which describes the conquest of Jerusalem, is either corrupt or partial, since it is difficult to make sense of. The beginning of the story is simple to understand: "The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, 'You will not come in here.'"

At this point, the king says something hard to understand about the blind and the lame, after which we are told: "David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David."

Then David tells his men something about "anyone who strike the Jebusites" or perhaps "anyone who wishes to strike a Jebusite," after which he (or someone else) reaches (or touches) the *tzinor* (pipe?). Then we hear of "the lame and the blind, whom David hates." The text ends with: "David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward."

The text is missing a clear explanation for how David conquered the city. The part about the *tzinor* may be trying to explain this, but if so, its intent is again unclear. Moreover, the entire back-and-forth about the blind and the lame is enigmatic. Finally, even David's words are unclear: Is it a tactical explanation, that the Israelites must reach/touch the *tzinor* in order to conquer the city? Does reaching/touching the *tzinor* have some other benefit? And how do the blind and lame fit in, and why does David hate them? Additionally, many verses look as if they have been cut in the middle, as if they were beginning to say something, but the ending is gone.

⁵⁵ As is often the case, the Bible has alternative descriptions of Jerusalem's history and capture. Compare Joshua 10; 12; 15:63; Judges 1:7, 8, 21; 19:10–12; 1 Samuel 17:54.

Some commentators suggest that the blind and the lame function in the story as a taunt, namely that Jerusalem walls were “impenetrable,” and even the blind and the lame could guard them. Others suggest that it was the blind and lame of David’s own troops who needed to be removed.

None of these explanations is all that satisfactory. Yigael Yadin, based on parallels in Hattusa, the capital of the Hittite empire, suggested that the reference to the lame and the blind is to a magical ritual intended to threaten anyone who attempted to breach the walls or hurt the defenders, that they would become blind and lame.⁵⁶

Yadin then claimed that the parallel description in Chronicles should be viewed as complementary. This text offers a straightforward conquest account without any difficulties or unexplained terms (1 Chr. 11:4–8 NRSV): “The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, ‘You will not come in here.’ Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, now the city of David. David had said, ‘Whoever attacks the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander.’ And Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief.”

Yadin argued that the magical spell explains why it was necessary to promise a reward not to the commander who conquered the city, but to the first to smite a Jebusite – that is, the first who would demonstrate that the magic is ineffective. Others suggested that this also explains the *tzinor*, which should be viewed as wind instrument, like a *shofar*, which in this case was used ritually (cf. the conquest of Jericho) to counter the Jebusite magic.

While this approach is interesting and creative, it is also problematic. Certainly, any reliance on Chronicles as opposed to Kings in this case is more than a little questionable, since the Chronicler often tries to solve problems in his earlier sources. Moreover, the addition of Joab here may be an attempt to explain his prominent position in David’s administration. The book of Samuel never explains it, and Joab is not mentioned as one of David’s top soldiers, so an explanation was wanting.

Insofar as the Hittite magic itself, we lack evidence from this era of such rituals, though admittedly, there are points in its favor: several biblical rituals have Hittite connections,⁵⁷ the Bible does claim that Hittites lived in

⁵⁶ Yadin 1952. Note that Mazar 1968 suggested that the Jebusites were a neo-Hittite group, which might explain the association with Hattusa.

⁵⁷ For example, Ayali-Darshan 2013.

Canaan (Gen. 15:20, 23:3; Num. 13:29; Deut. 7:1, etc.), and David's neighbor is Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3), perhaps a native of the city. In any event, Yadin's view did not garner much scholarly support.

A different interpretation of the story, which remains the most popular among scholars, is based on an interpretation of the *tzinor* as a water pipe, part of Jerusalem's unique water system. Until the 1980s, many scholars associated it with a water system known as Warren's Shaft, which included a system of tunnels and a (natural) shaft that connected the tunnels, together enabling the city's inhabitants to draw water from the spring without leaving the city walls.

Scholars therefore suggested that David's army (under Joab?) penetrated the city through this system and captured it by surprise. Nevertheless, archaeologists later realized that this water system was built only in the Iron II, hence David couldn't conquer the city this way.

With another surprising twist, however, more recent excavations revealed that while the (natural) shaft itself was indeed unknown until the eighth century BCE, there was an earlier system of tunnels, constructed during the Middle Bronze Age and leading to a fortified pool.⁵⁸ Subsequently, a number of scholars revived this interpretation of the *tzinor*, suggesting that David's army conquered Jerusalem via this water system.

As interesting and innovative as these suggestions are, we cannot corroborate any of them. And while we do think that David captured Jerusalem, the poorly preserved archaeological record in Jerusalem (see also Chapter 3) offers no corroborating evidence for it. In theory, David could have taken Jerusalem without a fight, merely through intimidation and then the surrender of the local ruler. This is actually implied by the fact that David later buys the area that came to be known as the Temple Mount from Araunah – perhaps the former ruler – rather than just taking it (see 2 Sam. 24:18–25). Putting these speculations aside, the basic outline of the story is clear: David took over Jerusalem, which became the capital of his kingdom.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Reich and Shukrun 2011.

⁵⁹ For a brief summary of the views of this enigmatic word, see, for example, Nelson 1992. Interestingly, Rowley (1950) even suggested that Zadok was the local Jebusite priest who simply continued under David.

DAVID AND THE PHILISTINES

For David to regain Saul's lost power, and even to expand it, he would inevitably have to deal with the Philistines. He may have begun to do so immediately after Saul's death, when he became king of Judah, at which point he apparently switched his status from a vassal or ally of Philistine Gath to an antagonist.

The main narrative (2 Samuel 5:17–25) presents the Philistines as attacking David twice after he captured Jerusalem, both times in the vicinity of the city, but failing to defeat him. Before we discuss these battles, we should look at another set of battles between David's warriors and the Philistines.

In Chapter 2, we noted that the appendices at the end of the book of Samuel contain descriptions of David's warriors and his battles with the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:15–22; 23:8–17). These snippets seem ancient, perhaps once part of the core history of David's rise, since they contradict in detail and spirit aspects of Samuel's main storyline (which is likely why they were moved to an appendix). We do not know when in David's life these stories are set, but the most reasonable assumption is that they derive mostly from an early period, when David was still more like a roving warrior than a king.

The text lists David's top warriors and relates several anecdotes about their feats. For example, in one of the appendices (2 Sam. 21:20–21): "Once again there was fighting, at Gath. There was a giant of a man, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot . . . ; he too was descended from the Raphah [giants]. When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimei, killed him."

In another such appendix, we hear a story that paints a compelling picture of David's early years in war against the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:13–17):

Once, during the harvest, three of the thirty chiefs went down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a force of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and a Philistine garrison was then at Bethlehem. David felt a craving and said, "If only I could get a drink of water from the cistern which is by the gate of Bethlehem!" So the three warriors got through the Philistine camp and drew water from the cistern which is by the gate of Bethlehem, and they carried it back. But

when they brought it to David he would not drink it, and he poured it out as a libation to the LORD. For he said, “The LORD forbid that I should do this! Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?” . . . Such were the exploits of the three warriors.

Note that the Philistines have a garrison in Bethlehem, David’s hometown, and David is in a stronghold by the Adullamite cave in the Shephelah. Note also that the impression here is of a small band of warriors fighting against a strong Philistine army. This fits with the period after Saul’s collapse, when the Philistines again had the run of Judah for a short time.

The spirit here greatly contrasts with the stories of David’s wars with the Philistines after he is king of all Israel and rules from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:17–20): “When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, the Philistines marched up in search of David . . . Thereupon David marched to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there.”

The text continues with another battle that David wins in the Rephaim Valley (vv. 21–25),⁶⁰ and then, after a detour telling the story of the Ark, the account picks up yet again with (2 Sam 8:1): “Some time afterward, David attacked the Philistines and subdued them; and David took Metheg-ammah from the Philistines.” It is unclear what Metheg-ammah means, but this verse communicates the final success of David and against the Philistines.

With all of Israel as his domain, David has a much more powerful army than he did when he was only king in Judah, and he apparently wields it more successfully than Saul did, since the Philistine threat is subdued.

It is possible that David’s success also benefited from economic pressure. We have evidence that the Aravah’s copper was, at least partially, redirected toward Phoenicia via the Beth-Shean Valley. We will elaborate on this in Section 4 of this chapter, but it is possible that after David took control of the copper trade – either through direct control of the mines or by controlling the roads leading there – he used this to pressure the Philistines, and this helped him “pacify” them.

Though it is unclear what the terms of the “peace” with the Philistines may have been, archaeology and the Bible agree on the

⁶⁰ The parallel text in I Chronicles 14:13 mentions only “the valley,” and in light of Isaiah 28:21, which alludes to these battles, apparently preserves an earlier tradition, placing the battle near Gibeon.

special status of Gath. Not only does the Bible speak of David and Achish having once been allies, but later, the book of Samuel describes David as having an elite force (Keritites and Pelitites) led by a man named Ittai the Gittite (2 Sam. 15) – that is, from Gath. It hardly seems coincidental that this very city, which the Bible describes as having been an ally of David, and from which Ittai and his band of warriors come, is the only Philistine megacity that doesn't shrink in size but thrives (see Chapters 7, 13).⁶¹

One way or the other, David's overthrowing of the Philistines appears to be historical, and whether it is due to David's defeating them militarily, to his forming a political alliance with them, or due to the strength of the Israelite–Canaanite alliance, the Philistines are no longer a major political or military factor, and we do not have any information of additional wars between them and David (or Solomon). All this is in line with the broader archaeological picture (see also the material changes in Philistia, as well as their apparent adoption of circumcision).

DAVID THE CONQUEROR: THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT

The Bible goes into detail regarding David's conquests in the Transjordan. His conquest of Edom is described only briefly in 2 Samuel 8:14, which mentions that David installed *netzivim* (governors?) over Edom.⁶² 1 Kings 11:15–16, however, provides some gruesome details: "When David was in Edom, Joab the army commander went up to bury the slain, and he killed every male in Edom; for Joab and all Israel stayed there for six months until he had killed off every male in Edom."⁶³

The same is true for his conquest of Moab, and after defeating the Moabites and killing many captives, the Bible summarizes: "And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute" (2 Sam. 8:2). The war with Ammon is described in greater length and ends with David's conquest of the capital city, Rabbah (modern-day Amman). In conjunction with war against Ammon, the Bible describes a series of

⁶¹ It is also possible that Ittai simply worked for David as a mercenary.

⁶² We ignored verse 13, as it is not clear whether it refers to Aram (Masoretic text) or Edom (LXX).

⁶³ See also Psalms 60:1–2; 1 Chronicles 18:12.

battles with the Arameans in the north: David defeats Hadadezer, the king of Zobah, and conquers Damascus.

In contrast, the Bible says virtually nothing about Israel's expansion north into the Jezreel, Beth-Shean, and Harod Valleys and on into the Galilean mountains. This may be because the Bible presents us with a twelve-tribe system that ostensibly dates back to Moses and Joshua, such that an explicit discussion of David conquering this territory would feel too incongruous. Why would he need to conquer "Israelite" tribes? Didn't Saul already rule them?

In fact, David may not have even presented his takeover of the north as a conquest, but instead, he may have taken control by declaring that the Galilean tribes (Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, Dan, and Asher) were really always Israelite and were simply being "repatriated." One way or the other, as Solomon is pictured as ruling over this area in the book of Kings and, archaeologically speaking, the region's inhabitants were not Israelites before this period, it seems clear that they were incorporated one way or another by David.

Moreover, we know that these areas, especially the valleys, had several strong Canaanite cities. These cities are referenced in other biblical texts along with other Canaanite enclaves, as only becoming part of Israel at some future point. This can also be seen in the description of many cities in Joshua 15–19 and Judges 1. The summary in the opening chapter of Judges sets the tone (Judg. 1:27–29), stating that "Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants" of many cities, including Beth-Shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo, adding that: "Canaanites continued to live in that land. [And] when Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not in fact drive them out. And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer."

While the verse here does not say when this happened, this same picture is repeated in Kings, when describing Solomon's forced labor projects (1 Kgs. 9:20–22):

All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel – their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable

to destroy completely – these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day. But of the Israelites Solomon made no slaves; they were the soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, and the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry.

According to this (admittedly late text), by the time of Solomon's reign, all these cities and regions were under Israel's domination, having either been conquered or having joined the Israelites of their own accord. David's assertion of rule over these areas, therefore, is assumed even if not stated.

THE REAL DAVID THE CONQUEROR

While reconstructing the minute details of David's character and the relations between him and Saul or with his family are highly speculative, the broader-brush painting of his rule seems much more secure.

At the beginning of this section, we noted several changes that characterize this era. We can now elaborate on these and reconstruct David's empire building in the following way.

DAVID AND THE PHILISTINES. After establishing his reign over the highlands, David defeated the Philistines, taking his success even into their own territory. This change of power was expressed in the (political and military) weakening of the Philistines, as almost all the small and mid-sized settlements in Philistia were abandoned, and some of the other mid-sized sites changed their character (and the excavators suggested that this reflects their having been taken over by the Israelites; see Chapter 7), and most of the large sites shrank in size.⁶⁴ The Philistines cities were not conquered, but they declined as the Israelites raided their hinterland, and many of the local Canaanites collaborated with them. The weakening of the Philistines is also expressed in the transformations of their culture at the time.

⁶⁴ The only megacity that did not shrink and maintained its status is Gath. We suggested earlier in this chapter that this might have been a result of the special relations the city had with David. The Philistines in this city maintained higher ethnic boundaries toward the Israelites (Chapter 7, and see Faust 2015b; 2020), but this does not negate political cooperation.

In the Iron I, we saw the extensive use of Aegean-inspired cultural traits: Aegean-style figurines, Aegean-inspired decorated pottery, and high levels of pork consumption (regardless of the origin of this practice). The popularity of many of the traits even increased in the course of the Iron I. This highlighting of “foreign” culture was part of their competition with both Canaanites and Israelites and served as a vehicle for highlighting Philistine distinctiveness and pride.

Once the scales tipped to the side of the highland polity, the Philistines gave up on this competition and lowered what anthropologists call ethnic boundaries. Pork consumption went down, Levantine-style figurines replaced the Aegean-style ones, the Aegean-inspired Philistine pottery disappeared, and the Philistines even adopted local script. And we have seen that they also appear to have begun circumcising at this point. Apparently, from the dominant power in the Iron I, the Philistines became “one of the neighbors” in the Iron IIA, limiting their role to Philistia proper and attempting to fit in culturally.

While David probably did not have a large standing army at this stage, his progress was achieved by raids, which crushed enemy resistance, and by creating alliances with many groups, including (some of) the Canaanites in the south and elsewhere.

Box: Empires and Their (Direct and Indirect) Rule

Earlier we referred to David as an empire builder. Such terms have fallen out of vogue, and it is therefore worth defining. While there are many definitions of empire, we have seen (Chapter 14) that they all involve expansion beyond the core area and the taking over of additional territories and groups, such that David’s expansion beyond the highland core fits neatly under the rubric of empire building.

Most such expanding polities – and even much larger and well-established empires like those of the Romans and the British – do not annex all the territories they conquer, but leave some territories semi-independent, under indirect control.

Many scholarly terms are used to refer to the different types of control and to the different types of empires that exercise them.

Box: (cont.)

Some scholars refer to territorial empires (i.e., those exercising direct control) and hegemonic empires (i.e., those exercising indirect control). Almost all empires practiced both types of control simultaneously. As a rule of thumb, most empires preferred indirect control, which is much cheaper, but in practice, usually had to revert to annexation over time.

Indirect control is often expressed in terms of alliances, in which one side is more dominant than the other, which in turn accepts a submissive role, expressed, for example, by paying tribute.⁶⁵ This was apparently the case with the expansion of the highland polity territories farther north (Syria) as well as into some of the Transjordanian territories (below). In what came to be known as “Israel proper,” David’s kingdom asserted direct control, but there was a likely a continuum of strategies with different arrangements according to circumstances

DAVID’S SPATIAL EXPANSION. David took over the Shephelah, which was mostly empty when the Iron IIA began, with the exception of – so far as we know archaeologically – five Canaanite villages in its easternmost part, the trough valley, and a sixth in the west.⁶⁶ As part of David’s strategy for keeping the Philistines at bay, one of his first actions seems to have been making an alliance with the Canaanites in the trough valley. In the past, these villages were probably dominated by the Philistines, but it appears that during this period, they were sitting on the fence between the highland Israelites and the Philistines. With David and Israel clearly on the ascent, the Canaanites in this small enclave cast their lot in with them and became part of the new polity. Most of the sites were even rebuilt on a larger scale in the process, apparently beginning with Tel ‘Eton (Chapter 6).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ There is a wide spectrum, from total subordination of the local ruler to the imperial one, to nominal subordination only, while maintaining a high level of autonomy, or even independence.

⁶⁶ Given its location, Khirbet er-Rai was not necessarily part of the same phenomenon.

⁶⁷ Tel Yarmout was abandoned (as was Khirbet er-Rai further west).

Soon after this, new towns began to pop up all over the Shephelah, beginning with Tel Zayit, and eventually large cities such as Lachish and Azekah were founded. This process continued throughout the tenth century and beyond, and was probably more significant at the time of Solomon, discussed later in this chapter. This process continued deep into parts of the southern coastal plain.

**Box: The Changing Identity of the Shephelah Settlers
and David's Rise**

We have repeatedly referred to the inhabitants of the Iron I villages in the trough valley – Tell Beit Mirsim, Tel 'Eton, Tel Beth-Shemesh, Tel Yarmut, and Tel Halif – as Canaanites. This is based mostly on clear-cut material culture patterns.⁶⁸ From the biblical text, it transpires that a few other sites were also inhabited at this time. The inhabitants, however, are portrayed in the Bible as Israelites (Judahites). At first this seems like a problematic clash between archaeology and the Bible. Why should all the archaeological sites in this same ecological zone be Canaanite and the biblical sites be Israelite?

Nevertheless, this contradiction is likely chimerical. First, it is possible – even likely – that the population of these sites was mixed and that David preferred to associate with groups closer to him. Second, and even more significant, even the people David associated with in Adullam and Keilah may not have originally seen themselves as Judahite or Israelite.

Note that the Bible describes the people of Beth-Shemesh in the Iron I as Israelite (1 Sam. 6), but their material culture shows that the Bible is being anachronistic here.⁶⁹ The same sort of process may be true of Keilah and Adullam, namely that by the time scribes wrote

⁶⁸ For example, Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011; Faust and Katz 2011, and many others; see also Chapter 3.

⁶⁹ As noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2, the story of the first battle of Even-haezer and the loss of the Ark is not part of the earliest layer of Samuel. By the time it was composed, Beth-Shemesh may have already become Israelite or was heading in that direction.

Box: (cont.)

the story down, the identity of Keilites and Adullamites was aligned with David's own self-identification as an Israelite and Judahite.

As we discussed in Chapter 6, in this period, the Canaanite villagers in this region were beginning a long process of assimilation which continued on through the Iron II, resulting in their being fully assimilated into the tribe of Judah. This assimilation was probably initiated by the success of the Israelites at this stage, and can be seen archaeologically in Beth-Shemesh, Tel 'Eton, Tel Beth Mirsim, and Tel Halif.

This process is apparently reflected also in Genesis 38, in the story of Judah and Tamar.⁷⁰ Judah, the eponymous patriarch of the tribe, settles near an Adullamite named Hirah, who becomes his friend and business partner. There he meets the daughter of a Canaanite called Shua and marries her. They have three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er marries a woman by the name of Tamar, but as he dies childless, Judah has Tamar marry Onan, who also dies childless. When Judah shows reluctance to allow Tamar to marry his third son, she puts on a veil, pretends to be a prostitute, and seduces Judah, bearing him twins, Peretz and Zerah. It is likely that the story, which is set in the trough valley, explains how two groups (families) known to be of Canaanite origins came to be regarded as part of the tribe of Judah.⁷¹

Many have further noted the similarity in names and details between Genesis 38 and stories about David's court. Tamar is the name of Judah's daughter-in-law as well as David's daughter. Judah marries the daughter (*bat*) of Shua (Bat-shua) and David marries Bat-sheva.⁷² The toponym Adullam appears in both David's story

⁷⁰ Although the story is inserted between two components of the Joseph story, the background of the story is likely connected to the Iron Age I (Aharoni 1979a: 219–220; Singer 1994: 306; Weinfeld 1993: 213; Rainey and Notley 2006: 115–116).

⁷¹ See also Aharoni 1979a: 220, 231; Liver 1982: 117; Weinfeld 1993: 213; Rainey and Notley 2006: 115–116; see also Singer 1994: 306, 312.

⁷² Interestingly, Bat-sheva's first husband, Uriah, is a Hittite – that is, he might have also been a non-Israelite who assimilated into Judah.

Box: (cont.)

and that of Judah and Tamar. Given the prominence of this region in David's rise to power, and the probable role David played in the process in which the local Canaanites were incorporated into Israel, this is likely not a coincidence.

THE CENTRAL COASTAL PLAIN. Having defeated the Philistines and blocked them by taking control of the Shephelah and parts of the southern coastal plain, David also takes the Yarkon basin to their north (Chapter 8), securing the new polity's (essential) access to the sea. As part of this conquest, the city of Tel Qasile is destroyed, and it is possible that Gezer, in the Ayalon Valley to the east, is also destroyed as part of the creation of this corridor.⁷³ Continuing north, much of the Sharon Plain too becomes part of the highland polity, with its northern section in the region of Dor gradually coming under Israel's indirect hegemonic rule.

THE SOUTH. The Beersheba–Arad Valley to the south was important due to the growth of trade that crossed it, especially the trade in incense and copper (see later in this chapter). The highland polity's expansion into this region is expressed by the destruction/abandonment of Tel Masos and its satellites.

The village of Beersheba itself, however, remained intact and began to flourish. Like the Canaanite villages in the Shephelah, this group may have decided to collaborate with the Israelite polity, which incorporated it; Tel Masos and its satellites resisted the Israelite advance and were crushed. At the same time or slightly later, Arad was founded as a village in the nearby valley. (Following Judges 1:16, the settlers would have been the Kenites, a group considered allied to Judah and thus permitted to remain.)⁷⁴

⁷³ 1 Kings (9:16) claims it was destroyed by the Egyptian pharaoh as a dowry or bride gift of sorts for Solomon.

⁷⁴ We noted that some scholars attribute this change to Saul (based on 1 Samuel 15), and this may be the case, but on the whole it fits well with the time of David, so we have decided to discuss it here.

Further east and south, in the Aravah, we see a massive peak in copper production, accompanied by many architectural changes and developments with many clear indications for ties to the northern polity. This works well with the biblical claim of David conquering Edom, although whether Israelite rule was more than nominal can be doubted (note that the reference to *netzivim* in 2 Samuel 8:14 indicates an unequal alliance). Israelite control over the region probably started at the time of David, but peaked slightly later, when parts of the Negev Highlands were also settled, and we will therefore elaborate on it later.

NORTHERN VALLEYS. As noted, the Bible doesn't say that David conquered the north, but it takes for granted that Solomon ruled over this area, and archaeology confirms that it was taken during this period. In the valleys, the large cities – Megiddo, Yokneam, Kinrot, Beth-Shean, and Tel Rekhes – were partially or completely destroyed, and the same was true for Abel-beth-maachah in the Hulah Valley (discussed as part of the Galilee). Tel Rehov is an exception, as it was left intact, exemplifying a process in which the inhabitants were willing to join the new Israelite polity and decided not to fight David (also Chapter 11).

The destruction of Canaanite sites (and the collaboration of others) secured this strategic region and enabled the new polity to tax caravans that passed through the valley as well as the crops that were grown in this fertile region.

We can exemplify the changes by reference to Megiddo. Stratum VIA was destroyed in the early tenth century BCE, apparently by David. The city was rebuilt shortly afterward, and then rebuilt again somewhat later (probably at the time of Solomon), but in a completely different manner: (1) The temple was not rebuilt. (2) Megiddo was rebuilt as a royal city and included mostly public structures. Clearly, most of the former inhabitants were transferred from the city, and it is possible that they were settled in new villages. Indeed, unlike the cities, some of the villages in the Jezreel Valley continued to flourish and new villages such as Nir David were founded.

Even before the Israelite conquest, the land in these valleys likely belonged to the crown(s) of the local city-states such as Megiddo, and thus it was relatively simple for the villagers to switch allegiance to a new

crown and go on living their lives as they had until then. They simply received new overlords. Some new villages were even established, showing how eager the new kingdom was to take advantage of the fertile valley.

Box on Issachar

The unique fate of the villages in the northern valleys may help explain the strange language of Jacob's blessing of Issachar in Genesis (49:14–15): "Issachar is a strong-boned ass, crouching among the sheepfolds. When he saw how good was security, and how pleasant was the country, he bent his shoulder to the burden, and became a toiling serf." According to the tribal divisions in the book of Joshua, Issachar lived in part of the Jezreel Valley (Josh. 19:17–23), the very place where villages continued and even thrived after David's conquest. The verse underscores the attitude of the villagers in this region: They preferred to avoid strife and live off the fat of the land, paying a share to the rulers. While they were not Israelites, ethnically speaking, the schematic list that divided Israel's inheritance treated them as such and referred to them as a "tribe" of workers.

GALILEE. In the Galilee, the villages were abandoned, while a number of central, fortified cities were built. The most prominent of these sites was Hazor, but others such as Tel Qarnei-hittim near the Arbel Plain and Tel Mador near the Acco Plain were established at this time, and Abel-beth-maachah was rebuilt. Here too it appears that some groups joined the new polity voluntarily, perhaps assimilating into it, whereas others suffered its heavy hand (Chapter 12).

TRANSJORDAN. Moab and Ammon experienced a wave of village abandonment at the time (Chapter 10). In Ammon, this was accompanied by a growth in population in the large, fortified settlement of Rabbah. It is likely that many of the villages were devastated in Israelite raids, some of the population (from the more southern regions) perhaps eventually being transferred by force, for example, to the Negev Highlands, whereas

others moved to better-protected areas to avoid a similar fate (i.e., the situation at Rabbah).

The fate of the Gilead, which experienced some settlement expansion in this period, was different, further exemplifying David's method of expansion. The flourishing of settlement here apparently reflects an alliance between Gileadites and Israelites, likely the result of (existing) cultural, ethnic, and perhaps also (new) political affinity between the groups.

THE "CRUSHING," OR DAVID'S MODE OF EXPANSION

We see here again two sides of the same coin: places that merged into Israel thrived; those that remained "other" or were seen as such by Israel ran. This is a common pattern that took place in the wake of early conquerors who, for whatever reason, incorporated some groups into the fold as brothers and others as subjects. Of special interest are those who cannot be brothers and do not wish to be subjects. These, when defeated, run to safer areas, leading to additional changes.

This last process seems to explain part of the situation in the tenth century, and we can illustrate it by reference to the situation in Zululand and its environment in the early nineteenth century. Shaka, the founder of the Zulu empire, transformed the nature of the local wars. Not only did Shaka expand and subdue tribes, devastating many settlements, destroying their social fabric, and incorporating them into the Zulu, but these expansions created a ripple effect extending much beyond the area conquered by the Zulu.

Thus tribes that ran away from Shaka into the territories of other tribes sometimes displaced them, forcing them to flee to other regions and fight the local tribes there, and so on, creating havoc over expansive territories. The process is known as Mfecane or Difcane— that is, "crushing" or "scattering" (see Chapter 14).

What we are seeing throughout the region of tenth-century BCE Israel and its neighbors is a mini-Mfecane brought about by David's conquests. In the process, David managed to loot large areas, annex others and tax them, and demand tribute from other territories. This probably led to abandonment even in areas he did not annex.

David also managed to connect with the Phoenicians on the coast and to tax the caravans utilizing all the major routes that crossed the Land of Israel, including almost all possible avenues of the Arabian trade and copper trade (more later in this chapter).

AGENCY AND PROCESS IN DAVID'S ASCENT TO POWER

In Chapter 14, we discussed the alleged contradiction between the role of agency (i.e., charismatic leaders) and process (i.e., circumstances, such as ecology, demography, and technology) in the formation of states. Kent Flannery concluded that "process and agency are complementary, rather than antithetical, perspectives."⁷⁵

In the spirit of Flannery's summary, we see David as another classic example of the way in which agency and process converge to create change. Just earlier in this chapter, we focused on David as an agent of change, on his personality and how he created a small empire. Before that, we discussed the unique geopolitical circumstances in which economic development took place in a period of dispersed political power, in which all the traditional centers of power did not yet recover. Putting this together, we can see how the circumstances of the time gave David the opportunity to act.

The Land of Israel is not a place where one expects to find large kingdoms, let alone empires. The region is poor and cannot produce very large surpluses; the population is limited, and was always in the shadow of that of the large river valleys in which the traditional centers of power developed. The decline in the latter enabled the development of a strong polity in the region, but in order for this to happen, an agent of change must have been involved. And David was the perfect agent.

It is likely that similar figures were active in other epochs, but when there were large empires, such agents could not accomplish much. Under the domination of empires, these agents – as talented as they may have been – could at most run local bands or be recruited to local or imperial armies and

⁷⁵ Flannery 1999: 3.

lead successful mercenary units. But the unique circumstances of the tenth century enabled David to reach his potential and create a mini-empire.

Understanding this bigger picture explains why David was not just another Lebayo, the fourteenth-century local chieftain in the Late Bronze Age.⁷⁶ His power base was centered in Shechem and his exploits are familiar to us via a number of letters about and from him unearthed in the city of Akhetaten (el Amarna) in Egypt.

Putting aside the fact that, as the archaeological evidence shows, David controlled a much larger territory than Lebayo, the mere comparison is flawed since the circumstances in the tenth century, during which David had a relatively free hand, were utterly different from those of the fourteenth century, when Egypt was at its peak and ruled over Canaan.

We cannot know whether Lebayo had the talent and charisma of David, but even if he did, he could not possibly have created an empire. In fact, if David had lived in the fourteenth century, he would have failed too. A “David” in the circumstances of the tenth century, however, created the perfect storm.

Box: What about Syria or How Far Did David Go?

The Bible claims that David expanded farther north. According to the book of Samuel, David fought a series of battles with the Arameans in the north in conjunction with the war against Ammon, in which David conquered Damascus. Unfortunately, the detailed archaeological evidence that stands at the heart of this book does not extend into Syria, so here we are on shakier ground in our historical reconstruction.⁷⁷

The obvious temptation is to dismiss the whole thing as fantasy, as the region is quite far away. Thus, even if one accepts the possibility of David defeating Philistines and his small, local neighbors, is not David battling strong polities and large cities far to Israel’s north simply too much to accept? Isn’t it more likely that this is an exaggeration, made to paint David as an amazingly powerful king?

⁷⁶ Compare Finkelstein and Naaman 2005; Finkelstein 2013b.

⁷⁷ Damascus cannot be excavated, being the site of a modern city, and there are very few relevant excavations from large segments of southern Syria.

Box: (cont.)

There are two problems with adopting this skeptical stance. First, on a literary level, the account of David's battles against these kings appears to be part of the core David story, which is very early and the closest thing to a historical depiction to which we have access. Second, part of this account is supported by an interesting archaeological nugget that surprised much of the scholarly world when it was uncovered.

Toi King of Hamath

Following the conquest of Damascus, the book of Samuel states (2 Sam. 8:9–10): "When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, Toi sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and to congratulate him on his military victory over Hadadezer – for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi. [Joram] brought with him objects of silver, gold, and copper."

If one assumes that this text was written much later, to embellish David's history, then the names should have been pulled out of a hat. And yet, in 2003, while excavating a temple to the storm god in Aleppo, German archaeologist Kay Kohlmeyer discovered an inscription from the eleventh century, written in Hieroglyphic Luwian, which begins: "I am Tai(ta) the Hero, king of Palestin."⁷⁸

As Haifa University professor of Bible Gershon Galil noted, this name is very similar to that of Toi, and Palestin was a province in the north that ruled over a number of cities, including Hamath.⁷⁹ In other words, whoever wrote the biblical text about Toi, the king of Hamath, was familiar with the king's name, which would be very unlikely for, let's say, a seventh-century scribe looking to embellish David's story. We can thus assume that the account has some truth to it.

The possible accuracy of David's wars in Aram makes another biblical claim – that David married the daughter of the king of

⁷⁸ Steitler 2010. ⁷⁹ Galil 2013; 2014.

Box: (cont.)

Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3) – sound quite plausible. If David is fighting wars and making allies with Aramean kingdoms far to Israel's north, then a close alliance with a small Aramean state *literally* on Israel's border (Geshur sits right beside the Sea of Galilee) is a very believable possibility.

While it is unlikely that David ever practically controlled these territories, it is possible that some of the leaders of the extensive territories to the north – that is, Syria – capitulated before David, perhaps paying him (sporadic?) tribute and thus enabling him to claim domination over large territories. This is what 2 Samuel 8:10 describes.

4 MID-LATE TENTH CENTURY: THE REIGN OF SOLOMON AND FORMATION OF A “STATE”

Common wisdom until two generations ago was that David was a conqueror and Solomon was a builder. This was based on the schematic description in the Bible and seemed to fit the archaeological evidence in many cities like Megiddo, Gezer, and probably Yokneam and others, where the destruction of the Canaanite cities was followed by construction of a small settlement, and only later was a full-scale city rebuilt. The destruction and partial rebuilding was attributed to David, of course, and the full-scale city to Solomon. While reality was clearly more complex, we find that, despite recent attempts to discredit this schematic outlook, broadly speaking, it fits the finds rather nicely. Before tackling the biblical Solomon, let us unpack the archaeological picture of the mid tenth century and of Israel's “great builder.”

PROSPERITY AND CONSTRUCTION INITIATED AT AROUND THE MID TENTH CENTURY BCE

While it is not always easy to divide the changes that began to unfold in the early tenth century and matured in its second half, a rough division is indeed possible and, despite much overlap between the two, we see that:

- (1) After the devastation and abandonment of many sites in most parts of the country during the first half of the century, a period of construction was initiated in the course of the tenth century. We find evidence for new and often impressive construction in dozens of sites throughout the country – for example, at Hazor, Megiddo, Tell el-Far’ah (N, biblical Tirzah), Gezer, Tel Mevorakh, Tel Qasile, Tel Gerisa, Tel ‘Eton, Tel Zayit, the Negev Highlands sites including the Aravah, and apparently also in Jerusalem and additional sites such as Abel-beth-maachah. It seems more than reasonable to associate most of this activity with the age of Solomon. Some of it began earlier, whereas a few sites might have been built later, but most of the process of (re)building was concentrated in this period.

Caveat lector: We should warn the readers that the “massive construction projects” we are discussing should be viewed in the context of the Land of Israel in the Iron Age. They are not *at all* similar to what one can see in old movies about King Solomon, nor is it even remotely similar to what one can see in Rome, Assyria, Babylonia, or Egypt.

- (2) Many changes in the region’s ceramic assemblage came to the fore simultaneously around this time (Chapter 5). First, widespread adoption of slip and burnish peaked at some point in the tenth century. This treatment was applied to serving vessels such as bowls and kraters, which were colored, perhaps to make them more attractive and to distinguish them from the cooking and storage vessels. This likely had to do with highlighting a growing hierarchy and was probably tied to gender (serving vessels being associated with male gatherings).

Another change involved standardization of forms. In the Iron I, pottery was locally made with regional variations. In the Iron IIA, however, pottery became more standardized and most of the local traditions disappeared. This includes, for example, the cessation in the production (at least in the Cisjordan) of the massive collared rim jar, which served as a symbol of a family’s prosperity. The same is true for the Aegean-inspired Philistine decorated pottery, whose production also ceased then. Furthermore, whereas the Iron I pottery in the highlands had

a limited repertoire, the Iron IIA ceramic repertoire there increased, and pottery began to include multiple types and subtypes.

As we have argued throughout the book (especially Chapter 5), these changes are a sign of growing social complexity. Thus, Israel (and some of its neighbors) changed from a loose collection of culturally similar villages and tribes to a socially hierarchical and better organized society, more akin to what we call a state society. Although it is difficult to date the changes, not all of which occurred at exactly the same time, it does appear as if they matured at around the middle of the tenth century or slightly later. Hence, it is likely that the peak of these processes exemplifies the consolidation of statehood under Solomon.

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

While these phenomena covered the entire country, we would like to zoom in on a few regions and review changes that seem especially important and that illustrate how the highland kingdom consolidated its rule.

THE SHEPHELAH. The colonization of the Shephelah, discussed in the previous section, was accompanied by a wave of massive construction activity, most of which can be associated with this phase (Chapter 6). The earliest (known) construction in the region, at Tel ‘Eton, could in theory have begun in the previous stage, during the initial takeover of the Shephelah, but the building of Tel Zayit, and Tel Halif, for example, is likely associated with the building phase.

THE SHARON. While much of the area was conquered, or at least raided, earlier, the Israelite hold on the Sharon was consolidated in this phase (Chapter 8). We can see this in the rebuilding of Tel Qasile in the Yarkon basin (although this might still relate to the time of David), Tel Mevorakh, on the northern part of the Sharon near the port city of Dor, as well as in Tel Gerisa, Makhmis, Tel Michal, Tel Makhmoret, Aphek, Tel Zorer, Tel Poleg, and more.

While not properly in the Sharon, this is probably the place to mention the rebuilding of Gezer at exactly this time. Gezer controlled the important fertile Ayalon Valley near an intersection between the international highway from Syria to Egypt and the road connecting the highlands around Jerusalem with Jaffa and the Yarkon basin area. The Iron I city was apparently destroyed by David and after an ephemeral construction phase was rebuilt at this time with public buildings and a massive six-chamber gate (i.e., a “Solomonic Gate,” see later in this chapter).

THE SOUTH. Following the destruction in the Beersheba Valley, we witness some building activity in the region, even if on a small scale – for example, the change in Beersheba and the establishment of the villages of Arad. It is possible that the establishment of a fortified settlement at Tel Malhatah should be associated with this phase (Chapter 9).

More important is the massive construction in the Negev Highlands. Even if it started earlier, as a few radiometric dates suggest, it peaked at this time. Building these fortified settlements secured taxation from all the major roads that crossed the south and justified the investment in bringing settlers and administrators to this dry and difficult region.

The Negev Highland sites also served as a bridge with the mining sites in the Aravah. They were supplemented by En Hazeva (biblical Tamar?), which guarded a major junction in the northern Aravah (probably along with additional sites), and together the system secured the miners’ loyalty to the highland polity.

Indeed, during this period, copper production in the Aravah peaks, and changes its physical structure and economic orientation: Fortifications were built at both Kh. en-Nahas (KEN) and Timna. (Actually, the peak started earlier, so some of the changes should probably be dated to the time of David.) At Timna we have remains of imported food, including Mediterranean fish, as well as high-quality donkey feed and expensive clothing, all suggesting that the local smelters were being provisioned from the kingdom of Israel to their north. This is supported by findings in the region’s other major copper vein at KEN in Transjordanian Feinan,

where an Israelite-style LFS house was discovered. All this implies at least indirect control with a local prefect or ambassador looking out for Israel's interests.

NORTHERN VALLEYS. After the devastation of the earlier phase, many of the destroyed or abandoned Canaanite cities were rebuilt as Israelite cities – for example, Megiddo, Yokneam, Beth-Shean, Hazor, and probably Abel-beth-maachah further north (Chapter 11).

Megiddo is a particularly useful example since its distinct phases are clear: In the early part of the tenth century (around 980/970), the last Canaanite city (Stratum VIA) was destroyed. It was sparsely resettled as a village for a short time (Stratum VB), after which it was massively rebuilt but with a very different city plan (Stratum VA–IVB), and became almost entirely administrative with palaces (at least one of which was built following the LFS template) and administrative complexes. The former temple was not rebuilt.

This fits with the overall character of the periods: First comes conquest, which is sometimes followed by sporadic settlement, then comes an organized building plan, including the establishment of administrative centers. The nature of the project highlights that, by this second stage, we are looking at a kingdom extending its rule with bureaucratic-like sites representing its interests throughout the land, in contrast to the more independent city-state-ish nature of the earlier Canaanite cities. Schematically, the devastation should be attributed to the conquest of David and the peak of the construction should be associated with Solomon.

JERUSALEM. While our ability to excavate the part of Jerusalem inhabited in this period is limited, some evidence for construction has been uncovered, expressed mostly in the Ophel. Here, late Hebrew University archaeologist Eilat Mazar uncovered an impressive city wall, which she dated to the second half of the tenth century BCE, adding that this “makes King Solomon out to be the best candidate for its architect.”⁸⁰ Some additional remains might indicate construction at this time, including a reuse of the Large Stone

⁸⁰ Mazar 2011: 148.

Structure, also excavated by Eilat Mazar, but here both the nature of the late remains and their dating are less secure (see also Chapter 3).

THE GILEAD. In this area of the Transjordan, we see not only continuity but even construction (Chapter 10). The most notable example is Tell el-Rumeith, generally identified as biblical Ramot Gilead, which was first settled in this period. It was a small, albeit well-fortified site on the Kings Highway, connecting Rabbah of the Ammonites with Damascus. Tall Zira'a also became a town at the time.

THE GALILEE. Settlement in the region was not uniform, and it was denser in the south, with its larger valleys, than in the higher north. Many Galilean villages were abandoned in the tenth century, in line with large parts of the country, and their inhabitants moved to other places (Chapter 12). This was part of the larger process in which the region became part of the emerging highland polity at the time of David. The newly established centers, largely built and developed at the time of Solomon, included places like Tel Mador, Tel Qarnei Hittin, Hazor (in the Hulah Valley), and more.

While the lower Galilee, and especially the valleys that divide it, were also settled by the Canaanite population, most of the inhabitants of the mountainous parts of the Galilee were tribal groups, not dissimilar to the Israelites of the highlands farther south. It appears that these groups, along with some of the inhabitants of the lower Galilee, quickly adopted an Israelite identity and joined the new operations.

To the west of the Galilee was the city of Tyre, which was already the center of a large trading empire. There were additional coastal cities farther south. The inhabitants of these cities were also Canaanites or, as they are called from this time onward (by scholars), Phoenicians.

While the history of the highland settlements (i.e., their abandonment in the tenth century) suggests that the region became part of Israel at the time, the establishment of a large fort at Rosh Zayit, which some suggest to have been Phoenician on the basis of the material evidence found in it, indicates that at least the western slopes were part of the hinterland of the Phoenician coast, probably under the influence or even the hegemony of Tyre.

Box: The Land of Kabul, Israel, and the Phoenicians

The excavator of a large building at Kh. Rosh-Zayit interpreted it as a tenth-century BCE Phoenician fort erected on top of and replacing an Israelite village.⁸¹ This interpretation was based on the material evidence unearthed in the buildings, including a large number of Phoenician vessels, which are typically missing in Israelite sites.

In addition, the identification of the site with biblical Kabul, a name that is preserved in a nearby Arab village (about two kilometers away), influenced this interpretation. 1 Kings 9:11–13 reads:

King Hiram of Tyre having supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. Therefore, he said, “What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?” So they are called the land of Kabul to this day.

The excavator of the fort, Zvi Gal, suggested that this was the background for the erection of the fort (not all scholars agree). Whether this text reflects an actual debt payment or whether it is a kind of apologetic for Solomon suffering a loss in the north (i.e., the Tyrians building of the fort on their own initiative) is hard to know. Either way, the overall picture of Israel and Tyre teetering between alliance and competition probably reflects the reality of that period well.

The Phoenicians were the major import/export power in the region, with the means to purchase luxury items and sell/trade with it abroad, and Israel was the most powerful land polity at the time, probably serving also as Tyre’s agricultural hinterland. Israel also dominated the spice trade routes and much of the trade with Edom’s copper production.

The copper trade was especially important in this regard. While the shortest and most direct route to the Mediterranean for

⁸¹ Gal and Alexandre 2000. For the northern trade route, see Mazar 2021: 256.

Box: (cont.)

Edomite copper would have been one of the Philistine coastal cities (Gaza or Ashkelon), we have noted that studies of the copper trade from this period suggest that much of the copper was directed along the rift valley toward Beth-Shean and from there (perhaps via Rosh-Zayit) to the northern coastal plain. This highlights Tyre's importance as the major economic power on one hand, but also Israel's role in controlling the trade on the other.

THE ISRAELITE FINGERPRINT

In addition to the fact that the Israelite highland polity is the only actor that could have been responsible for the building projects in this period, we have noted that some phenomena point directly to the highland polity as the instigator.

CITIES WITHOUT TEMPLES. As noted earlier in this chapter (see also Excursus 8.1), the archaeological evidence suggests that temples were a common feature in Canaanite cities, and a few were indeed uncovered in sites conquered by Israel in the early tenth century – for example, in Megiddo, Beth-Shean, and Tel Qasile. These temples usually continue a long cultic tradition – in Megiddo, for example, the same area served this purpose for millennia. Nevertheless, they were destroyed and the Israelites never rebuilt them, nor did they replace them with other temples.

The findings in Hazor tell a similar story. While a few temples were uncovered in the Late Bronze Age Canaanite megacity, when the (much smaller) city of Hazor was rebuilt in the mid tenth century BCE, the ruins of the temple located within the area of the new city were not rebuilt. Instead, this area was left empty, surrounded by a wall which defined it as a sort of forbidden area (*cherem* in Hebrew).

One way or another, none of the new cities boasted a temple. Israelites made little use of temples, and very few such structures have been discovered in both Israel and Judah throughout the Iron

Age, which is telling considering how extensively Israelite sites have been excavated. The rebuilding of the cities without temples, therefore, is indicative of the agents of construction: the Israelites.

LONGITUDINAL FOUR-SPACE (LFS) HOUSES: THE ARCHITECTURE OF POWER. The term “longitudinal four-space (LFS) house” refers to a long building with a few long spaces and a broad space at the back, which was very popular in Israelite settlements in the Iron Age (Excursus 6.1). In the ideal formulation, the buildings had three long spaces and a broad space at the back, but many buildings deviated from this formula, and the number of long spaces varied.

Only a few Iron I buildings follow the basic guidelines, and almost all deviate in some details (e.g., the entrance is from the side, or the broad room does not cover the entire width of the building). We can refer to these as proto-LFS houses. During the Iron II, however, the vast majority of the houses in Israelite settlements follow the guidelines more strictly. Most houses are quite small and are of the three spaces subtype (two long spaces and a broad one at the back), but the basic guidelines are now adhered to.

It appears that the tenth century was a formative period as far as the LFS house is concerned. This is when the plan was quite suddenly (1) formalized and (2) was used over vast areas, greatly exceeding the territories in which the prototype has been found.

Formalized (or classical) tenth-century BCE LFS houses were discovered, for example, at Tel ‘Eton in the Shephelah, Tel Mevorakh near Dor, Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley, in Negev Highland sites (e.g., Atar Haroa, Metzudat Nahal Yeter and Metzudat Ramat Boker), and even at KEN (Feinan) in the Aravah, and apparently also at Tel Sera in the southern coastal plain. These are not only the first examples for the use of this “exact” template, but the plan is followed quite accurately. These houses are for the most part very large; they were apparently chosen by the new polity to serve as governors’ residences in the various territories that were acquired, symbolizing Israel’s control. Hence their formal plan and large size, as well as their wide geographic distribution. This distribution, along with the cities built without temples, allows us to track the expansion of the new polity. While a few might have been built already in the time of David, most were apparently erected at the time of Solomon.

THE YARKON BASIN. The Sharon at large, and especially the Yarkon basin, is of special interest. The region is of poor ecological quality, so the settlement peak and the building activity during the tenth century demands an explanation. The reason for this settlement seems to lie with the importance of its position as a coastal strip in the center of the country, enabling access to the Mediterranean (Chapter 8).

This specific location would have been of major importance only to an inland polity, centered in the area of Jerusalem, which desired its own ports. A center farther north – for example, in Shechem or Samaria – would have used Dor or another site in the northern Sharon as a port. And one farther south – for example, in Hebron – would have used the port of Ashkelon (or even Gaza). The Yarkon basin (and Jaffa) would have appealed only to a center located somewhere between these cities, and Jerusalem is the likely candidate.

Box: Sharon Settlement and the Dating of Biblical Lists

Despite the Sharon being the only significant stretch of coast that the Israelites controlled, it is rarely mentioned in the Bible. And when it is mentioned, it is often depicted as a remote marshland. “I am a lily of the Sharon,” says the woman to her lover in Song of Songs (2:1), playing off the region’s exotic (dangerous?) reputation.⁸² During most of the Iron Age, the region was hardly settled and was left as swampland. It was, therefore, simply unimportant for the authors and editors of the Bible, as well as to their readership, most likely as a result of the Israelites negative attitudes toward the sea and trade.⁸³

That said, some of the references to the Sharon, explicit and implicit, cut in a different direction.

1. Solomon’s list of governors (more later in this chapter) mentions Ben Heseb as responsible for the Plain and the Land of Hephher (1 Kings 4:10), a province that included the Sharon.⁸⁴ Slightly

⁸² See also Isaiah 33:9, 35:2, 65:10. See discussion in Baly 1957: 135–137.

⁸³ Faust 2011, with references. ⁸⁴ For example, Wright 1967; Aharoni 1979a.

Box: (cont.)

farther to the north along the coast, Dor is the center of another district (1 Kings 11).

2. 1 Kings 5:16–31 describes how King Hiram of Tyre sent cedars by sea and Solomon’s men had to carry them inland to Jerusalem for building the Temple. Given the much higher costs of land transportation when compared to maritime or riverine transportation, the only sensible way to transport the woods to Jerusalem would be to ship them over the Mediterranean from Lebanon to the mouth of the Yarkon river, and then drag them up the river to Aphek. From there, they would have been transported overland. While Kings never says that this was the route, the much later 2 Chronicles 2:15 claims that the Tyrians sent the trees by the sea to the sea of Jaffa.⁸⁵ Clearly, this narrative refers the southern Sharon.
3. 1 Chronicles 27:29 lists David’s ministers, among whom it mentions: “And over the herds that fed in the Sharon was Shitrai the Sharonite.” While the reliability of Chronicles is always doubtful, in cases such as this, where data that could come from older sources is thrown in without apparent ideological bias, it is not unreasonable to take it seriously.⁸⁶

Notably, these sources, which imply that the Sharon is administered by the kingdom, and even actively used as a port, all describe the tenth century. As noted, this is the only period in the Iron Age in which the region was populated with settlements.

While the book of Kings was composed by the Deuteronomist in the seventh century, and Chronicles centuries after this, if these lists and accounts were invented at such a date – to glorify great kings of the past, let’s say – it is amazing that they chose only the very kings who ruled in the tenth century. Why not invent stories about Hezekiah? Or Josiah?

⁸⁵ Jaffa most likely shared the fate of the Yarkon River and came under Israelite control in the tenth century.

⁸⁶ Compare Rofe’s (1988: 248) comment on “sporadic data” in Chronicles. We will address similar information from Chronicles later in this chapter when discussing the tribe of Simeon.

Box: (cont.)

While this is not a solid proof that these texts are historical, archaeology supports this picture. In no other part of the Iron Age would such an image make sense, both in terms of actual activity in the region and in terms of geopolitical considerations – that is, that this is the only time in which a highland polity would have a strong interest in the Yarkon basin. This gives the biblical account credibility.

At the very least, it is difficult to imagine that the correspondence is entirely coincidental and that the texts date from hundreds of years later and their authors had no idea that the Sharon had been settled at the time. In this, these texts are similar to many others, which suggests that large segments of the biblical descriptions could not have been written much after the time of the highland polity (the United Monarchy).

THE FIGURE OF SOLOMON IN THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

It seems clear that Israelite kings were responsible for the aforementioned construction activities, and Solomon is of course the natural candidate. But what can we say about Solomon himself? As noted in Chapter 3, Israelite kings almost never left inscriptions, and there was little in the way of outside powers to mention Israelite kings in this period, so we have no epigraphic evidence for Solomon the person. That said, we can try to get a sense of the man as the Bible describes him and see how well any of it fits in with what we know about this period. In addition to his focus on building projects, discussed in the Bible and in line with archaeology, the book of Kings depicts Solomon as exceedingly wise, exceedingly wealthy, a heavy taxpayer, and an important player in international trade. We will begin with the more personal, unverifiable, and likely legendary elements and move to the more general components whose plausibility, or at least their background, can be assessed.

As for Solomon's wisdom, the Bible states (1 Kgs. 4:29–34):

God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's

wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt . . . He composed three thousand proverbs, and his poems numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees . . . he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Obviously, the text here is hyperbolic. Whether Solomon ever composed proverbs or wrote poems, we do not know. The opening verses of the biblical books Proverbs and Song of Songs claim that the works come from Solomon, but these books are collections from disparate authors, with the ascription to Solomon meant to give the books authority and heft.⁸⁷ Whether the historical Solomon actually inspired anything in these works is unknown, nor do we know whether he was famous for wisdom outside local circles. In short, the biblical description as is cannot be accurate, the texts clearly exaggerate Solomon's wisdom and fame, but whether it is based on some core truth about Solomon or is merely the fanciful invention of scribes we simply don't know.

As for his great wealth, the Bible describes Solomon as having a very expensive lifestyle, in support of which he taxes his provinces aggressively (1 Kgs. 5:1–4):

Solomon's rule extended over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and the boundary of Egypt. They brought Solomon tribute and were subject to him all his life. Solomon's daily provisions consisted of 30 kors of semolina, and 60 kors of ordinary flour, 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture-fed oxen, and 100 sheep and goats, besides deer and gazelles, roebucks and fatted geese.

One kor equals 220 liters, and along with the number of animals, it is clear that the description of Solomon's wealth is again exaggerated, but whether this is close to or far from the truth is unknown. Archaeologically speaking, there is simply no way to know whether such descriptions have any bearing on reality.

⁸⁷ The opening of Ecclesiastes as well as the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon also ascribe these works to Solomon, but they are from the Hellenistic period and cannot possibly derive from him even secondarily.

The same is true about his taxation, with one important caveat: We know he massively invested in building projects. To do this, he must have taxed his subjects heavily, since without *corvée* labor or the funds to hire workers (or purchase slaves), the highland polity could not have embarked on such a project. That this taxation could have been extended to cover a lavish lifestyle, as the Bible claims, seems possible, but remains conjectural.

As for Solomon's part in international trade, the book of Kings tells us, for instance, of his relationship with Hiram, the king of Tyre; the visit from the Queen of Sheba (10:1–13); his establishing a port together with the Tyrians, at Etzion-geber on the Red Sea (9:26–28); and of his collection of exotica, from spices to rare animals and birds, which he could have accumulated only through international trade. See, for example, the description of many of these things in 1 Kings 10 (vv. 22–25): “For the king had a Tarshish fleet on the sea, along with Hiram's fleet. Once every three years, the Tarshish fleet came in, bearing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.” While granting that the biblical depiction of Solomon's international importance is filled with hyperbole, here archaeology has a lot to add in helping us determine whether such an international Solomon fits with the milieu of the time.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN THE TIME OF SOLOMON

For a long time, scholars believed that after its collapse at the end of the Late Bronze Age international trade didn't pick up again significantly until the eighth century, when the Phoenicians began their westward expansion. Over the past two decades, however, it has become clear that international trade was already thriving in the tenth century (see Chapter 3).

By this time, the Phoenicians – the people whom the book of Kings describes as Solomon's ally in multiple endeavors of building and trade – had reached many of the Mediterranean coasts, if not beyond. By the end of the tenth century at least, they reached beyond the straits of Gibraltar, establishing settlements on the Atlantic coasts. Moreover, evidence suggests that silver from the west was used in the Levant already.

From a different direction, evidence from a residue analysis study of Iron Age pilgrim flasks shows that already in the eleventh–tenth

centuries, they sometimes contained cinnamon, a lightweight luxury commodity originating in the area of the Indian Ocean. Its presence demonstrates that the trade in incense products was already common at this point, which is reminiscent of the story of the Queen of Sheba's visit, as it mentions that she arrived along with "camels carrying spices" (1 Kgs. 10:2). This also is in line with the recent evidence about the existence of prospering kingdoms in south Arabia in the tenth century, and perhaps even evidence that such traders lived in Jerusalem at the time.⁸⁸

The traders would have needed to cross through the Negev in order to get to Philistia or Egypt, and this was likely one of the reasons for the establishment of the Negev frontier settlement, which also supported the copper mining in Timna, another component of the international trade (copper was a major export material).

While the copper production was likely Edomite, we noted that material cultural connections to the Israelites in the north are strong at Timna and at KEN (where a large, formal LFS house was uncovered), fitting with the description in 2 Samuel 8:14 that David already placed a governor (*netziv*) in Edom. Here again, the Bible and the archaeological record point toward some form of Israelite control, probably through a local governor fortified with troops. All in all, the age of Solomon was a time of international connections and trade.

SOLOMONIC CONSTRUCTION, SOLOMONIC GATES, AND THE BIBLE

We have seen that the era in which Solomon was supposed to have ruled was characterized by public construction in many sites, and the description of him as a builder seems to fit the archaeological data. In this case, however, we can go even beyond this general observation.

The six-chambered (Solomonic) gates in Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor have long been the classic piece of archaeological evidence for the Solomonic era. In Chapter 3, we noted how the understanding of these gates changed significantly over time: First it was taken as an historical marker for Solomon's activity, then the gates (or some of them) were

⁸⁸ See Chapter 3 for references.

redated by some scholars to a later period and said to have no connection to Solomon, and finally, these gates (even if not always along with the city walls reconstructed by Yadin) have been gradually re-redated back to the tenth century by most scholars.

A similar process can be seen with the direct attempts to connect these constructions and the biblical narrative. Again, as discussed in Chapter 3, a six-chambered gate attributed to Solomon was discovered in Megiddo by the Chicago expedition. Years later, when Yadin discovered a similar six-chambered gate in Hazor, he noted the similarity in form and date between the two. Remembering the biblical reference in 1 Kings 9:15 to Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, Yadin reexamined the publication of Gezer and suggested that remains of a building dated to the Hellenistic period were actually half of a similar six-chambered gate. Later excavations proved Yadin right. The association between these “real” gates and a biblical verse soon became a high point for biblical archaeology, proving both the historicity of the relevant texts and the discipline’s potential in demonstrating it and in bringing the Bible to life. And despite the many twists in the debate that evolved, we have seen that most scholars today date these gates to the tenth century, and there is no problem in attributing the gates to Solomon.

Does this mean the verses should be dated to the period of Solomon or shortly thereafter? During the wave of skepticism discussed in the opening of Chapter 3, such use of biblical verses was dismissed as naive. For example, Finkelstein and Silberman argued that the text should be dated to the later years of the northern kingdom and reflects the importance of these three cities in that period.⁸⁹ Ironically, such a reading suffers from the same lack of critical methodology as that of Yadin.

In 2010, UCLA professor of Bible William Schniedewind showed that the various evaluations of the text’s historicity fail to take into account its literary history.⁹⁰ The key, he argued, is noticing the editing in the text represented by the resumptive repetition about Gezer. To

⁸⁹ Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 159–161. ⁹⁰ See Schniedewind 2010.

understand this point, we need to look at how scribes in the biblical period worked.

When later scribes wished to add material into a text, after the addition, they often repeated a phrase or even a sentence from where the original text ended in order to orient the reader. This is what scholars call a resumptive repetition. The material in between the two versions of the same text is, in such cases, the added material. In our text, Schniedewind noted, the added material has to do with how Gezer became Israelite (1 Kgs. 9:15–19; added material in italics, repeated material in bold):

This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD and his own house, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, **Gezer** – *Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and burned it down, had killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife* – **so Solomon rebuilt Gezer**, Lower Beth-horon, Baalath, Tamar in the wilderness, within the land, as well as all of Solomon's storage cities, the cities for his chariots, the cities for his cavalry.

When we remove the gloss plus repetition, we see a simple text listing the various places Solomon made use of forced labor.

Thus, Schniedewind argues, it stands to reason that the author of the Solomon story didn't write this text from scratch, but was making use of a document, most likely from a palace archive. Hence the list is probably early and authentic, and lends some credibility to the attribution of the construction to Solomon. And since, as we have seen, most scholars today date the gates to the time of Solomon, the association seems plausible.

Finally, Schniedewind's analysis also stresses the importance of the cities in the second half of the list. While most were not excavated, in Tamar (En Hazeva) tenth-century remains were unearthed and, given what we know about the region in the tenth century BCE, an erection of a fort or a way station there makes perfect sense.

Box: Solomon's Districts

The book of Kings goes into great detail about Solomon's administration (1 Kgs. 4:7): "Solomon had twelve district governors over all Israel, who supplied provisions for the king and the royal household. Each one had to provide supplies for one month in the year." As the verse clarifies, the number 12 here corresponds to the months of the year, and the system was organized with the idea that the palace would be supported yearly by the combined payments of the districts.

The text continues by listing the twelve districts, including the name of each governor (1 Kgs. 4:8–19):

1. Ben-Hur – in the hill country of Ephraim.
2. Ben-Deker – in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh, and Elon Bethhanan.
3. Ben-Hesed – in Arubboth (Sokoh and all the land of Hepher were his).
4. Ben-Abinadab – in Napthoth Dor (he was married to Taphath daughter of Solomon).
5. Baana son of Ahilud – in Taanach and Megiddo, and in all of Beth-Shean next to Zarethan below Jezreel, from Beth-Shean to Abel-Meholah across to Jokmeam.
6. Ben-Geber – in Ramoth Gilead (the settlements of Jair son of Manasseh in Gilead were his, as well as the region of Argob in Bashan and its sixty large walled cities with bronze gate bars).
7. Ahinadab son of Iddo – in Mahanaim.
8. Ahimaaz – in Naphtali (he had married Basemath daughter of Solomon).
9. Baana son of Hushai – in Asher and in Aloth.
10. Jehoshaphat son of Paruah – in Issachar.
11. Shimei son of Ela – in Benjamin.
12. Geber son of Uri – in Gilead (the country of Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and the country of Og, the king of Bashan). He was the only governor over the district.

Box: (cont.)

The exact boundaries these districts represented are difficult to determine. For example, the area of Issachar (#10) and the area of the northern valleys (#5), though not exactly coterminous, seem to overlap significantly. The same is true for the extended territory of Ramoth Gilead (#6) and Gilead (#12). Sometimes they seem to refer to large territories, such as all of Ephraim (#1), and other times a very limited territory, such as the city of Mahanaim in the Transjordan (#7). Finally, the differences between the Masoretic Hebrew text and the ancient Greek recensions call many details into question. We will therefore not attempt to determine the boundaries in the list.⁹¹ Nevertheless, some relevant observations are worth making.

Tribal or Anti-tribal?

According to many interpretations, the borders envisioned here are quite different from the tribal borders familiar from Joshua 14–19. This has led some scholars (e.g., Ernest Wright) to argue that this was not merely a districting but a conscious redistricting, perhaps intended to break tribal loyalty.⁹² Such breaking of tribal connections is familiar from early states that began as conquering tribes: Genghis Khan and Shaka both engaged in this.

Noted German biblical scholar Albrecth Alt, however, and the many scholars who follow him, believe that the changes were less radical. Yohanan Aharoni, for example, noted that “No attempt was made to interfere with the traditional tribal areas . . . , only when administrative considerations outweighed it was the principle violated.”⁹³ While the districts were perhaps not intended to intentionally break the tribal units, they did not fully conform to them and altered the reality when needed.

⁹¹ For example, Wright 1967; Aharoni 1979a; Rainey and Notley 2006.

⁹² Wright 1967.

⁹³ Aharoni 1979a: 317; see also Alt 1913; Stager 2003.

Box: (cont.)**Greater Israel**

The boundaries here include both the Israelites from the highland core and conquered territories such as the Transjordan, Gilead, the northern valleys, and the Galilee.⁹⁴ They do not, however, include Moab, Edom, Ammon, or Damascus. This shows the difference between territory that came to be regarded as Israel proper and vassal territories. Only the former that paid “regular” taxes to the palace; the latter paid a sort of tribute.⁹⁵

Judah

It is notable that Judah does not appear in this list. One approach to this problem is to reconstruct Judah as the twelfth district.⁹⁶ As noted, the current twelfth district seems to overlap with the sixth; even the names of the prefects are similar – Geber and Ben-Geber – and the current twelfth district may have originated as a marginal gloss on or revision of the sixth district but was put in the wrong place by a later scribe. Noting that the Greek has a thirteenth unnamed prefect in charge of Judah, it has been suggested that Judah was the twelfth district. As the first word of the next verse is Judah – “Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea” – a scribe could easily have either dropped one of the Judahs by accident or moved the final word of this verse to the opening word of the next. This suggestion also has the benefit of explaining the strange comment that the twelfth prefect was “in charge of the land” as if all the other prefects were not in charge of theirs.

Nevertheless, most scholars still follow the text as we have it in the Hebrew and suggest that the lack of Judah implies that Solomon granted his home territory special status.⁹⁷ This preferred status and

⁹⁴ Rainey and Notley 2006: 174–179.

⁹⁵ For the distinction, see, for example, Smith 2014.

⁹⁶ Albright 1925; Cogan 2001: 210–211. ⁹⁷ For example, Aharoni 1979a: 309–320.

Box: (cont.)

the tension it caused in Israelite politics are already noted in the story of Sheba ben Bichri's rebellion against David in the book of Samuel (2 Sam. 19:41–44; 20:1–2) and had significant implications in Israel's rebellion against Rehoboam after Solomon's death (1 Kgs. 12:16–17, and see later in this chapter). Whether these stories are historical or merely literary flourish to give some color to the splitting of the kingdom, the underlying claim – that David and Solomon favored Judah – fits with this second reading of the list, namely that, of all the Israelite territories, original and conquered, only Judah seems to have been living tax-free.

Names

We have already discussed the importance of names in identifying the time or place in which texts were written down (what scholars call *sitz im leben*). Five of the names in the list begin not with a personal name but with Ben, which means “son of.” This is unusual in the Bible, prompting the great American archaeologist of the previous century William Foxwell Albright to suggest that the list was torn at the beginning.⁹⁸ Albrecht Alt, however, noting a similar style of naming in documents from Ugarit – a major Late Bronze Age center on the Syrian coast – suggested that these men were Canaanite locals.⁹⁹

While this view has its detractors, given the uniqueness of this subset of names in the Bible, the suggestion remains attractive.¹⁰⁰ If correct, it would imply that Solomon didn't simply send some Judahite family member to rule the district but chose from among local elites.

Political Marriages

Two of the prefects in the list, Ahimaaz in Naphtali (#8) and Ben-Abinadab in Napthoth Dor (#4), are said to have been married to

⁹⁸ Albright 1925: 25–26.

⁹⁹ Alt 1950. For a list of such names, see Pardee 1989/1990.

¹⁰⁰ See Naveh 1990.

Box: (cont.)

Solomon's daughters. This is not the first example of political marriage we find in the David stories. For instance, Solomon is said to have married Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs. 3:1) and David is said to have married Maachah, the daughter of Talmi, the king of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3), a small Aramean polity near the Sea of Galilee. And it is likely that most of the royal weddings were political, even if not wedded to royalty. Such marriages connect two polities or (as in this case) leading families with familial bonds to strengthen the likelihood of loyalty.

The two prefects who marry Solomon's daughters are in the north. Naphath-Dor is where the important Phoenician city-state of Dor was situated, and the area of Naphtali borders on the Sea of Galilee on its east, and perhaps the Tyrian hinterland on its north-west. Cementing the loyalty of these prefects may have been needed to ensure that the region didn't change allegiance to one of its neighbors such as Tyre or Geshur.

Solomon and Dor

Before we move on, we would like to comment on the status of Dor in light of the results of the excavations at the site. The fifth district is called Naphath-Dor, implying that Dor was, under Solomon, a district of Israel. And yet Ayelet Gilboa, a leading archaeologist from the University of Haifa, along with Ilan Sharon of the Hebrew University and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith of Princeton Theological Seminary, argued that this could not be so.

Analyzing the finds at Dor, they showed that the city became "ethnically" Israelite only in the second half of the ninth century BCE. They therefore concluded that Dor could not have been an Israelite district under Solomon, rather "The depiction of Dor as an important Israelite administrative centre fits best with the archaeological realia of the mid-9th to mid-8th centuries BC."¹⁰¹ While we

¹⁰¹ Gilboa, Sharon, and Bloch-Smith 2015: 72.

Box: (cont.)

applaud the detailed and careful analysis, and even agree with the conclusion that the city became Israelite only in the second half of the ninth century, we must warn that (1) only a small part of the mound has been excavated, and (2) cities have been known to have mixed ethnicities.

Moreover, the idea that their analysis disproves the Solomonic provenance of the list follows a problematic reading of the biblical text and the historical situation it represents. The ethnic identity of a city's inhabitants does not determine its political affiliation. Everybody agrees that Rehov was part of the kingdom of Israel (see Chapter 11), although the site was apparently Canaanite throughout its history.¹⁰² Similarly, the Canaanite nature of Dor does not necessarily tell us about its political position. Judges 1:27–28 says that the Canaanites of Dor became subject to the Israelite's taxes around the same time as other cities in the region, such as Megiddo and Beth-Shean, which points in the direction of an Israelite takeover, whether by force or via alliances.

Not only is an Israelite takeover of these areas in line with the bigger picture of the tenth century BCE, but it is aligned with the unique situation in the Sharon in this period, discussed earlier in this book (cf. Chapter 8). The tenth century is the only period in the Iron Age when settlement in the Sharon was significant, and it is only then that it could have been important, which explains its inclusion in district 3.¹⁰³

Note that a port city in the southern part of this district 3, Tel Qasile, was destroyed and then rebuilt as an Israelite city (without a temple). What we see is that Israel, in this time, is interested in controlling this coast and that it had the power to conquer cities

¹⁰² Some Israelites certainly lived there, and perhaps they will be “discovered” in the future.

¹⁰³ Aharoni 1979a: 308; Rogerson 1985: 32; Rainey and Notley 2006: 175. Note that while most scholars limit this district to the coastal plain, some – for example, Wright 1967 – believe that it includes parts of Samaria.

Box: (cont.)

and to establish settlements from scratch and support them. If district 3 is authentic, we need to take seriously the possibility that district 4, Dor, is authentic as well. This would mean that the Dor was dominated by Israel, like Rehov, but that, at this stage, it did not become ethnically Israelite.

Further archaeological support for this comes from Tel Mevorakh, a site not far from Tel Dor, where a large LFS house dated to the Iron IIA was exposed (the excavator, Ephraim Stern, dated it to the tenth century). Such structures likely mark the presence of Israelite governors or officials and this LFS house may have been the residence of the Israelite overseer of Dor. Perhaps, then, Dor maintained an autonomous position, as its leader became Solomon's client, and an official governor (Ben-Abinadab) was placed opposite the city itself.¹⁰⁴

SOLOMON AS STATE BUILDER

Solomon was more than just a builder of walls and gates; he was a state builder, though not a conqueror like David. Solomon inherited a large territory from his father, and he does not seem to have expanded it. Instead, he consolidated his core kingdom with building projects from the revenue he collected from taxing his people and extracting tribute from his clients, as well as from customs and international trade.

The difference between Saul's kingdom (chiefdom?), David's mini-empire, and Solomon's more bureaucratic state can be seen in the stark difference between how their administrations are summarized in Samuel and Kings.¹⁰⁵ Saul's inner circle is described thus (1 Sam. 14:49–51):

¹⁰⁴ This is, of course, only speculation. Perhaps the governor lived in Dor itself, or perhaps it is the local king of the city who is listed as a governor, and he married Solomon's daughter as part of the alliance agreement. Still, it appears that the list is early and the city was nominally under the control of the highland polity.

¹⁰⁵ The development itself was noted by many – for example, Schniedewind 2004: 59–60.

Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua; and the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger, Michal. The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner son of Ner, Saul's uncle; Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

This is simply a list of his family members. Even the one "professional" position, the general, is filled by Abner, Saul's first cousin. Saul's administration is essentially his kinship unit, his extended family, which held all the power.

When David's administration is described, we read something a little different (2 Sam. 8:16–18): "Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were priests." There are two major differences with Saul's list. First of all, we see many more "positions" (for Saul we hear of only one).¹⁰⁶ Moreover, although David's priests are his own sons, and Joab, according to Chronicles at least, is David's nephew (the book of Samuel does not say this), the rest of David's men are not related to him. Another list later on, apparently detailing a time from later in his reign (2 Sam. 20: 23–26), has someone named Ira the Jairite as priest instead of David's sons, making the administration even less family based.

In the narrative sections, we read of foreigners serving both Saul and David. While some positions, like that of Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam. 22:9), might not be indicative of administration, the reference to Ittai the Gittite as commander of a corps for David (2 Sam. 15:19) could be more significant in this regard. Moreover, the aforementioned Keritites and Pelitites were likely foreign mercenaries, something like a Swiss Guard, and their existence could say something of the extent of David's

¹⁰⁶ Of course Saul must have had more than just a general working for him. Indeed we hear of people like Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam. 21:8–9) and Ahiya the priest (1 Sam. 14:3). The Bible presents David as a general and, as noted, it is likely that Ishbaal was a member of Saul's military administration. Nevertheless, the Bible's perception of Saul's administration, as presented in the list, is as a kinship-focused administration, with other people serving ad hoc.

administration. Still, they were commanded by an Israelite, as is clear from his Yahwistic name, Benaiah, and that of his father, Yehoiyada. Thus, it appears that most of the top-ranking people for David were still Israelites, or at least they came from Israelite-like groups who easily assimilated into Israel.

While David's list is more of a proper administration compared with Saul's, it remains relatively thin. Other than the recorder and the secretary, we have a general, a captain of the guards, and some priests. Moreover, the list is much shorter than the lists of David's top *thirty* warriors (2 Sam. 23:8–39). This is because David's reign is much more focused on war than on administration. And the "heroic" nature of the list is in line with a small army with personal affiliation and comradeship, rather than a large bureaucratic army. Thus David had administration, unlike Saul. But, and this is an important point, David's administration is simple.

Compare this to the list of Solomon's administrators (1 Kgs. 4:1–7):

King Solomon was king over all Israel, and these were his high officials: Azariah son of Zadok was the priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah sons of Shisha were secretaries; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was in command of the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; Azariah son of Nathan was over the officials; Zabud son of Nathan was priest and king's friend; Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram son of Abda was in charge of the forced labor. Solomon had twelve officials over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each one had to make provision for one month in the year.

Notably, the general is not the first listing. Moreover, we no longer have a captain of the guards. Instead, we have officials such as a "king's friend" – a position mentioned in the David narrative as occupied by Hushai the Archite (2 Sam. 16:16) but not in the list of officials – someone in charge of the palace, someone in charge of taxes, and twelve separate district governors. None of these are blood-related. Moreover, not all of the names sound Israelite, and they may have been Canaanites selected because of their knowledge in administration. (The same might apply for the district governors, discussed earlier in this chapter.)

Furthermore, Solomon's division of Israel into tax districts – discussed in detail earlier in this chapter – fits with what we saw in places like Megiddo, where the cities were rebuilt as administrative centers, as well as the construction of governors' residences across the country. This also correlates well with the aggressive resettlement project in this period, in which some villagers were moved into cities and other city dwellers were moved into agricultural villages (Jezreel Valley).

The administrative lists of these kings underscore the way Israel developed from a chiefdom or a nascent kingdom under Saul, to a militaristic kingdom under David, to an administrative state under Solomon. We will see in Section 6 of this chapter that the "progress" is not straightforward, but if these lists had all simply been invented by a late scribe, we would have to credit him with a neo-evolutionist training in anthropology, since the texts craft the administrations to reflect the step-by-step increase in complexity.

Still, we must remind the readers that Solomon's kingdom was nothing like the grandeur of established empires, which accumulate wealth over time and create long-lasting structures. In order to properly appreciate Solomon's achievements, we must erase the images of his wealth that we saw in old movies and fictional books.

5 LATE TENTH CENTURY: THE END OF AN ERA

The glorious period, however, did not last long. According to the Bible, two major events occurred upon the death of Solomon. First, the northern and eastern tribes rebelled against his son Rehoboam, leaving him in charge of only the Benjamin region and south. Second, Pharaoh Shishak attacked Jerusalem and agreed to spare it only after Rehoboam paid him a massive bribe in gold (1 Kgs. 14:25–28). The second incident may have helped solidify the first (though the Bible never makes this claim), since Rehoboam would have lacked the funds, and perhaps the standing, to launch a campaign to take back the north.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END? A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

As we noted in Chapter 2, the Bible contains conflicting accounts of what led to Israel's rebellion, each imbedded in a very different evaluation of

Solomon's rule. In one version, Solomon is an excellent king all around (e.g., 1 Kgs. 4:25), and the main weakness of Solomon's reign is the heavy taxes with which the Israelites are burdened in order to supply him and to support his perhaps overly ambitious building projects. Upon Solomon's death, the people ask Rehoboam to go easier on the taxes (1 Kgs. 12:4), but Rehoboam refuses in a spectacularly offensive way and the people rebel. In this version, the fault is that of the inept son of a talented father.

In the other version, Solomon sins against God by allowing his wives to build shrines to foreign gods in Jerusalem. Thus God has the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite appoint Jeroboam the Ephraimite as the future king of the northern kingdom, which Jeroboam establishes upon the death of Solomon. When Rehoboam's army comes to reconquer the territory, a prophet named Shemaiah announces that the split was God's will, and as a consequence, the army turns back. This gives Jeroboam time to fortify his western and eastern capitals of Shechem and Penuel (1 Kgs. 12:21–25).

According to this version, during Solomon's lifetime, God began punishing him by enticing both Damascus and Edom to free themselves from Israel's yoke. Which version is the more accurate with regard to the losing of Damascus and Edom as vassals is difficult to say, given the obvious bias of each.

It is possible that these rebellions took place in Solomon's time, but the first account wishes to ignore this because of its positive evaluation of Solomon and its desire to place all the blame on Rehoboam.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, it is possible that the rebellions happened in the time of Solomon's son, or at least very close to Solomon's death, but that the second version, wishing to pin everything on the sinful Solomon, presents them as having taken place earlier.

From the perspective of biblical scholarship, the second account is generally more suspect since it was either written or heavily reworked by the Deuteronomistic authors and is in general a later source. (See more on this in box "Hadad the Edomite and Shishak.") Moreover, this account is more theologically driven as it explains events based on sin

¹⁰⁷ This version also whitewashes Solomon's loss of the area of Kabul to Tyre, as a payment of little consequence.

and divine retribution. Nevertheless, this reasoning is inconclusive, and we do not really know when these regions broke away from Israel.

Here we would like to pause for a moment, as the reader may have noticed that, whereas in most previous sections we started with archaeology, here we began with the biblical text. This is because archaeology's contribution to the identification of the highland polity's downfall is, for reasons explained later, indirect. Let's see what archaeology has to contribute with regard to the second element mentioned earlier in this chapter, Shishak's campaign.

SHISHAK'S CAMPAIGN

The biblical description of Shishak's campaign in 1 Kings (14:25–28) is short and mentions only Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸ When in 1828, Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion discovered the inscription of the Twenty-Second-Dynasty pharaoh Shoshenq I on the Bubastite Portal, describing a campaign in the Levant, he believed he had found confirmation for the biblical account. Certainly the timing works well; Shishak of the Bible almost certainly refers to Pharaoh Shoshenq I. Other than that, however, things have not progressed much in the past two centuries to confirm or deny the biblical account.

First, the dating of Shoshenq I's rule is not clear, and is largely dependent on the biblical association, so there isn't much support here. As for the content of the list, many of the sites listed are unreadable, and of the readable ones many are not identified. And of the identified sites, not all were excavated. And of the relatively short list of sites that were identified and excavated, some appear to have a destruction layer, but often nothing is certain.

Thus, while many scholars have speculated that a certain destruction should be attributed to Shishak, nothing inherent in specific destruction layers points to who the responsible agent was. Sometimes different destruction levels at the same site have been attributed to this

¹⁰⁸ The description in Chronicles is more detailed, but according to most scholars is only a reworking of the original narrative in Kings. For the Chronicler's method/approach, see Knoppers 1990.

campaign, depending on the chronological preferences of scholars. One site whose date of destruction is more secure is Moza, whose relevant stratum (VII) can be pinpointed, but in many cases, the identification of the relevant strata is doubtful.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, the inscription itself doesn't mention Jerusalem – which is the only city mentioned in the account in the book of Kings. Then again, many of the names are missing, so it is possible that one of these said Jerusalem. In any event, there is no way to tell, archaeologically speaking, whether Rehoboam paid Shoshenq gold.

The main archaeological correlation with this campaign comes from the Negev. First, Shoshenq's list mentions dozens of sites in the Negev, and most scholars agree that given the history of the settlement in the Negev, which for long periods was devoid of significant settlement, these names correspond with the Negev Highlands sites mentioned earlier in this chapter (see also Chapter 9). The campaign may indeed be responsible for the decline of these sites, although the region did not undergo a sharp decline, rather, various sites dragged on for some time. Even so, the Egyptian campaign probably had a direct impact on some of them, whereas others were impacted indirectly. This is related to changes in the organization of copper production in the Aravah, which many scholars explain as the result of Egypt taking over control of copper production from Israel (Chapter 9). With the change in allegiance of the Aravah mines from Israel to Egypt, the kingdom of Judah – what was left of the highland polity after the north broke off – could not maintain these (now) expensive and not very productive frontier settlements, and the surviving ones fell into decline.

Additional support for the historicity of the campaign came from a recent paleomagnetic study (Excursus 3.1; Chapter 11), which showed that a number of sites in the northern valleys were destroyed concurrently. This suggests a military campaign, and radiometric dating in one of the sites associates the destruction with Shishak. Moreover, what clinches this identification is the explicit reference to two of the sites – Beth-Shean and Rehov – in Shishak's list.

¹⁰⁹ For Moza, see for example, Greenhut 2021: 189–190, and references. Similarly, throughout the book we attributed the destruction of various strata to this campaign.

Box: Hadad the Edomite and Shishak

The biblical story of Hadad's rebellion against Israel provides further evidence for how Edomite allegiance shifted from Israel to Egypt in this period. The book of Kings describes the escape of Hadad the Edomite from David during the conquest of Edom (11:17–20):

Hadad fled to Egypt with some Edomites who were servants of his father. He was a young boy at that time . . . and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, assigned him an allowance of food, and gave him land. Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him his sister-in-law for a wife, the sister of Queen Tahpenes. The sister of Tahpenes gave birth by him to his son Genubath, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house; Genubath was in Pharaoh's house among the children of Pharaoh.

The passage continues with Hadad returning to Edom upon the death of David (vv. 21–22) and becoming an enemy of Solomon (v. 14).

While until twenty years ago any reference to Edom in such a context was seen as anachronistic and late, we have seen that this is no longer the case. Hence, it is worth reconsidering the story.

The idea of a massive Edomite rebellion against Solomon early in his career does not work well with the broader archaeological record since Edom appears to have still been under some form of Israelite control at the time. Yet, as we noted, this story is imbedded in the second, Deuteronomistic Solomon account (Chapter 11 plus the account of Jeroboam's rebellion), which is critical of him. As such, the story may have been presented in such a way as to paint Solomon as a failure when it comes to Edom.

What is more likely is that the rebellion either happened at the very end of Solomon's reign or after his death, during the reign of Rehoboam, but that it has been artificially moved backward in time to after David's death to make Solomon look bad. If so, this would fit nicely with the archaeological record and the Shoshenq inscription.

Box: (cont.)

Upon the death of Solomon, Egypt's policy in the Levant shifted and the pharaoh decided to take control of the Edomite copper mines. As part of this campaign, Shoshenq apparently encouraged Hadad's rebellion, turning Edom into a client of Egypt, not Israel.

While we cannot verify any of the details about Hadad, the nature of the episode makes very good sense against the background of Solomon's times as a prelude to the Egyptian takeover. If the story was not at all based on a tenth-century account – regardless of its historical accuracy – how could a late scribe invent such a story that would fit so nicely with the larger historical picture of the Egyptian role in the politics of the time and its takeover of Edom in the late tenth century?

Box: The Negev Settlers and the Tribe of Simeon

What happened to the Negev settlers? As we noted in our discussions of the Negev frontier settlement (Chapter 9), the population there was likely made up of some remnants from the destroyed Beersheba Valley settlements of Tel Masos and its satellites, Edomites from Seir forcibly moved into the territory, and perhaps some others, who gradually coalesced into an identity group. They were accompanied by Israelite garrisons and governors, likely from the nearby region of Judah.

We suggest – and we are not the first – that this identity had a name: Simeon.¹¹⁰ Simeon is a strange tribe, geographically speaking. Their alleged area – as outlined in the description of its inheritance in Joshua 19 – is entirely inside that of the tribe of Judah and consists mostly of the Beersheba Valley and the northern Negev. We suggest that when the frontier settlement fell apart, most of the inhabitants moved north into the Beersheba region and established the core settlements of Simeon as we know them from the Bible.

¹¹⁰ This was suggested, following a different historical reconstruction, by Aharoni 1979b: 216; Eitam 1979.

Box: (cont.)

Support for this reconstruction comes from the opening section of Chronicles, which records several unusual anecdotes about the tribe of Simeon.¹¹¹ Wandering bands of Simeonites enter various settled lands, kill off the inhabitants, and take it for themselves. One such story stands out (1 Chron. 4:42–43): “And some of them, five hundred men of the Simeonites, went to Mount Seir . . . they destroyed the remnant of the Amalekites that had escaped, and they have lived there to this day.”

Why would a group of Simeonites go to the Edomite region of Seir, of all places? We suggest that as the group was coalescing around its Simeonite identity (later being absorbed into Israel), one group apparently maintained their connection with their homeland in Seir and returned.

THE DIVISION OF THE MONARCHY IN THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

What about the division of the monarchy into Israel and Judah? Is it not reflected in the archaeological evidence? Here we encounter one of the classic problems in archaeology, that of identifying boundaries in the archaeological record, of correlating material patterns with groups and polities. During most of the Iron Age II, Israel and Judah were two distinct polities. We know this, first of all, from outside sources. While we lack external sources for the period of the United Monarchy, due to the weakness of the regional powers in the tenth century, from the ninth century onward, such texts reemerge. The Mesha Stele, the Tel Dan inscription, as well as various Assyrian and Babylonian sources, all refer to two separate polities, one in the south and ruled by the “house of David,” and another in the north.

The division is also at the core of the biblical narrative of the post-Solomonic period. Even with its doublets and contradictions, the book of Kings is clear that Israel and Judah became two separate polities after

¹¹¹ Unlike the rest of Chronicles, which appears to be working off Samuel and Kings, the opening chapters make use of ancient lists and sources.

Solomon and remained so until the conquest and destruction of the northern kingdom two centuries later.

Archaeology enables us to see differences between the two polities. For example, the nature of socioeconomic stratification differed between them, with Israel having a more developed hierarchy, whereas Judah, for the most part, had only a small group of rich households and a very large group of poorer ones. There were also differences in the nature of urbanization; in Israel, settlements were arranged following the rank-size rule, whereas Judah followed the primate city model.¹¹² And Israel was also richer, wealthier, and better organized than Judah.¹¹³

But here is the rub: We have succeeded in finding these political, social, and economic differences because we knew there were two kingdoms and thus knew where to look. If we were to have looked for the borders of the polities, however, based only on archaeological data, we would most likely have failed. The political boundaries between Israel and Judah simply do not have clear marks, and cultural differences between Israel and Judah have not yet been identified – not for lack of trying. As even Israel Finkelstein noted, “In fact, in the period before 720 BCE, it is not always easy to identify material culture characteristics that distinguish between the two Hebrew kingdoms.”¹¹⁴

The identification of ethnic groups in the archaeological record is not a simple task. The ethnicity of the users does not necessarily influence the use of most material traits, and many variables cut across ethnic boundaries (see also Chapters 4–7, Excursus 10.1).

To give a modern example, one can find jeans, T-shirts, and McDonald’s restaurants all over the world. It may be that these things began in America and can be called American culture in some abstract way, and yet, at the same time, it is clear to everyone who has traveled

¹¹² The primate city model refers to the phenomenon whereby the largest city in a polity (the primate city) is several times larger (sometimes up to ten times larger) than the next city after it in the ranking; the rank-size rule (or distribution) refers to a common situation in which a certain ratio exists between the city’s size and its ranking within the settlement hierarchy in a given polity: the second city will have half the population of the largest city, the third city will have one third of this population, and so on (see Faust 2012: 198–199, and references).

¹¹³ For example, Faust 2012: 196–206. ¹¹⁴ Finkelstein 2015: 202.

outside the United States that the fact that people are wearing jeans and eating a Big Mac does not mean they are Americans.

And if this is true for traits that came to symbolize America, this is even truer for mundane objects and materials: Do the plates people use have an ethnic meaning? Sometimes, but usually plates cross ethnic boundaries. And how about the material from which our bookshelves are made? Only very rarely can we imagine that these would have an ethnic association. Undoubtedly, most of the daily artifacts we use are not connected to our ethnicity, and this applies to ancient societies as well.

Thus an examination of the distribution of simple Iron II bowls will usually not reveal sharp boundaries; they will hint neither at the ethnic identity of the owners nor at political boundaries. This is true for most traits. Still, some material traits, symbolic and behavioral alike, are associated with specific groups and demarcate the boundaries between one group and another.¹¹⁵ The distribution of such traits often reveals sharp boundaries, which, at least in some contexts, might help us delineate ethnic boundaries (see discussion of different patterns in Chapter 7), though in this case, not between Israel and Judah. Instead, it appears that the Israelites (writ large) used some traits to demarcate ethnic boundaries between themselves and other groups during the Iron Age II. These include, among other things, LFS houses, avoidance of pork, the worship of YHWH, practicing cult in non-temple contexts, reluctance to produce royal inscriptions, and more.¹¹⁶ All these have clear and sharp boundaries in space, encompassing Israelites living in *both* Israel and Judah.

In other words, we can easily delineate the boundaries of the Israelite population in Israel+Judah, as these traits differentiated them from their neighbors. This is because, while Israel and Judah were two distinct polities, they were not comprised of different peoples.¹¹⁷ Clearly, both Israel and Judah were themselves composed of separate groups like tribes and other kinship units, and perhaps

¹¹⁵ For example, McGuire 1982; Emberling 1997; Jones 1997; Faust 2006a; 2019c.

¹¹⁶ It is not necessary that all the Israelites worshipped only YHWH, but the important point is that this deity was worshipped only in Israel and Judah, and not elsewhere.

¹¹⁷ The notion that political entities should be comprised of people who share an ethnic identity is a modern one and developed in the modern era in Europe. Traditional ethnic groups did not feel that their identity justified a political expression and such

even regional entities, but none of these local identities seems to have paralleled the political ones.

This is actually what we would expect to find based on the biblical text since, biblically speaking, the two polities are both “Israelite” – that is, one people who split from each other for political reasons. As Roland de Vaux (1903–71), the French Dominican priest and a prominent biblical scholar, wrote:¹¹⁸ “[O]ne fact . . . is very clear: Israel and Judah are sometimes allies, sometimes enemies, but they are always independent of each other, and other nations treat them as distinct entities. This political dualism, however, does not prevent the inhabitants feeling themselves to be one people; they are brethren.” And this is indeed what archaeology tells us.

This is why there are so few material correlations with the discussion of the division of the monarchy. The political crisis was a political event, and as archaeology is better equipped to study processes than events, we cannot expect to find it well represented in the material record.

This is why the clearest – even if indirect – evidence we have for the breakup of the highland polity is the decline suffered in various peripheral regions that were of importance to it: The Negev Highlands sites, and their decline, were already mentioned in this context, and another example is the Sharon and especially the Yarkon basin. Both of these regions flourished in the tenth century and later declined. The only explanation for the decline is that they were important to the highland polity and once this crumbled, the settlements there were left to flounder.

Box: Two Peoples? Pigs and Pots

The claim we make about the lack of differentiating cultural markers between Israel and Judah is well known and established, but it has been challenged of late by certain, exceptional studies claiming to have identified two such traits: pork consumption and perhaps also pottery styles.

groups were content with kings who ruled by higher authority regardless of their ethnicity, as long as they did not suppress them too much.

¹¹⁸ De Vaux 1961: 97.

Box: (cont.)**Pork**

Lidar Sapir-Hen, Guy Bar-Oz, Yuval Gadot, and Israel Finkelstein have suggested that while in the Iron I, the highland population in both the north and the south avoided pork, during the Iron II, only Judahites avoided this meat.¹¹⁹ But this suggestion is based on a misunderstanding. The “Israelite” sites in the kingdom of Israel in which pork was consumed in the Iron II include Hazor, Megiddo, Yoqneam, Rehov, and similar sites – all valley sites most of whose population was always identified as Canaanite (i.e., under Israel’s political control, but ethnically non-Israelite), including by Finkelstein himself.¹²⁰ The finds Sapir-Hen et al. reported simply strengthen this view.

Notably, the only relevant Iron II highland site in the kingdom of Israel that Sapir-Hen et al. discuss¹²¹ is the village at Horbat Rosh-Zayit, which appears to have been ethnically Israelite,¹²² and where pork was indeed avoided. In short, the claim that pork consumption was a cultural marker distinguishing between Israelites and Judahites would seem spurious.

Pottery

While the consensus has been that the differences between Israel and Judah were small and insignificant (see even the quote from Finkelstein cited earlier), a recent paper by Tel Aviv University’s ceramic specialist, Lily Singer-Avitz, argues that there were differences in pottery styles between the two polities.¹²³ While her work is careful to avoid discussion of ethnicity, others will certainly use her

¹¹⁹ Sapir-Hen et al. 2013. For refutation of this argument, see Faust 2018a; forthcoming b.

¹²⁰ Finkelstein 1999: 48; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 191–194; see also Faust 2000; 2012; Mûnger 2013; Mazar 2015; see also Chapter 11.

¹²¹ Sapir-Hen et al. 2015: 5, 9.

¹²² Gal and Alexandre 2000; contra Sapir-Hen et al. 2013: 9. ¹²³ Singer-Avitz 2018.

Box: (cont.)

data to pursue this line of argument. It is therefore worthwhile to review the evidence in some detail.

We should start by stating that we do not dispute the differences she noted. Nevertheless, her use of the evidence to compare Israel and Judah is problematic. First, Singer-Avitz compared geographical regions that were quite far from each other – she did not include a single site between Jerusalem and Samaria in her study. Moreover, most of the sites in Israel are located in the northern valleys, and, as noted, were mainly settled by Canaanites. These issues in themselves would be enough to cast doubts on the comparison, but there is more.

The differences she identified are gradual. This is significant since, despite overall similarities in pottery styles, pottery production was done locally and there were always small differences between workshops. The farther away one moves from a production center, the larger the stylistic differences. When one compares pottery groups from faraway regions, it is inevitable to find differences. This is the nature of production. What we would look for to determine ethnic boundaries, and what Singer-Avitz *did not* find are sharp distinctions – for example, when proximate settlements or even neighborhoods have different pottery types (see the procedure outlined in Chapter 7).

Lacking such differences, we are not looking at culturally meaningful traits that members of each group would adopt to distinguish them from the other, such as we saw with the Iron I Philistine versus Israelite pottery (see Chapters 4–7). Rather, we are seeing accumulated, gradual regional stylistic variations (meaningless for our purposes). Such differences shift gradually as one moves from one region to another and accumulate over distance. These relatively small differences are what one might expect from a traditional society before the adoption of real mass production.

Box: (cont.)

Furthermore, these regional differences do not even conform with the boundaries between Israel and Judah but cut across them. Take, for example, the assemblage of Khirbet Marjameh, located in the southern part of the kingdom of Israel, not far from the border with Judah. Amihai Mazar, who excavated the site, noted that the assemblage is mixed and includes many Judahite forms, concluding that “The Kh. Marjameh assemblage may therefore be viewed as intermediate between pottery typical of Judah and that characteristic of the central and northern parts of the kingdom of Israel during the eighth century B.C.E.”¹²⁴ In other words, the site’s assemblage includes both forms that are typical of the north and others that are typical of the south.

This is also corroborated by a new and detailed study by David Ben-Shlomo of Ariel University and his colleagues, who noted that the new evidence from Khirbet Marjameh shows that although “most pottery can be compared with types in the northern Israelite kingdom,” there are also many “pottery types usually associated with Judah.”¹²⁵

The studies of the ceramic assemblage from Khirbet Marjameh are important for assessing the supposed challenge posed by Singer-Avitz’s data for two reasons:

- (1) Indirectly, because it shows the nature of gradual regional variations – that is, that unless there was a cultural boundary where the use of certain items suddenly “stopped,” the popularity of different forms gradually decreases with the distance from the production centers. And since there were many production centers, the assemblages will often be “mixed.” Kh. Marjameh, therefore, simply shows that the shift between the assemblages studied by Singer-Avitz was gradual rather than sharp.

¹²⁴ Mazar 1995: 114. ¹²⁵ Ben-Shlomo et al. 2018: *110.

Box: (cont.)

- (2) Directly, since due to its location, north of the border between Israel and Judah, this assemblage unequivocally shows that there was no ceramic boundary between the two kingdoms and that Judahite forms were still in use in the kingdom of Israel (only that their popularity gradually decreased with distance, in accordance with #1).

If the readers compare the gradual changes identified here with the sharp boundaries we identify in a number of Iron I forms, they will appreciate how ethnic boundaries look and how this is not an example of that phenomenon.¹²⁶

6 FROM TRIBES TO EMPIRE TO KINGDOM: SAUL, DAVID, AND SOLOMON IN LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

In sum, the overall historical arc of the United Monarchy is discernable. The early period of Israelite settlement during the Iron I coincided with the collapse of the Bronze Age kingdoms and the concomitant decline in trade. No major powers operated in the area, and local, small-scale forces emerged over time.

During the eleventh century, the dominant power in this subregion were the Philistines. They ruled over the coastal Canaanites (the Avvim) and were feared by the Canaanite villagers in the Shephelah and even the larger Canaanite city-states farther north. Hostility between them and the Israelite villagers was constant and got worse as time went on.

As a result of Philistine aggression, the Israelite villagers of the highlands united their forces and a powerful chief named Saul managed to take control and become their first king. Saul was likely a charismatic figure and a powerful warrior remembered for his huge size, “head and shoulders” above other Israelites.

¹²⁶ Scholars often associate differences they identify between “south” and “north” as distinguishing between Judah and Israel, without considering the possibility of gradual (rather than sharp) changes, let alone the possible association of the differences (even if real) with other types of groupings (e.g., tribal) (cf. Fleming 2012 and Richelle 2019).

He was initially successful, first in defeating the Philistines in the southern Samarian highlands and then extending his control into Judah, unifying various tribes and establishing a small highland kingdom. Still, politically or administratively, this was a family affair. Saul ruled due to his charisma, military success, and (perhaps) ruthlessness, with the help of his family members and with virtually no administration (this could be defined as a sort of chieftdom, if one wishes to choose a neo-evolutionary “technical” term). Then Saul was killed in battle, apparently as a result of attempting to extend his rule northward into the Jezreel Valley. This led to the dissolution of his polity. The forces of change, however, were unleashed, and there was no turning back.

After a brief civil war, David, a ruthless leader and a military and political genius from Judah, took the helm. Given the lack of any substantial outside power – this, after all, was a period of decline in the major centers of the ancient Near East – David took advantage of the political vacuum and used his charisma to forge a local political power in a way reminiscent of other self-made conquerors.

David defeated the Philistines and expanded in all directions. Some regions he conquered, merging his people with neighbors in the Galilee, the Negev, and the Gilead, who were similar in culture. In other regions, David merely exerted direct or indirect rule over neighbors whose identity remained non-Israelite. Evidence suggests that his control, either through conquests or via alliances, extended to Edom in the south and perhaps even to parts of Syria (though the evidence for the latter is very partial).

Thus David turned Saul’s nascent kingdom into a small empire. David’s administration was far more complex than Saul’s, and it included various “ministerial” positions. Given the Israelites’ lack of administrative experience, David enlisted conquered peoples to help the administration, just like many other conquerors who faced a similar situation (e.g., Genghis Khan). Still, his administration was fairly simple, and family ties played an important role. David’s mini-empire was created by a combination of unique circumstances and exceptional charisma. Like many other instances throughout history, this was a “stateless empire,” or an empire (or mini-empire) that preceded the state (Chapter 14).

Box: Israelite Reactions to the Emerging State

Certainly many outside groups who found themselves conquered, subjugated, or forced to pay tribute had reason to dislike the new empire. Interestingly, we have reason to believe that even among the core, Israelite group, attitudes to the developing “state” were mixed.

While many clearly benefited from the expansion and the economic implications, Israelite attitudes toward authority were quite negative. This can be seen in numerous biblical passages, which despite the heavy pro-monarchic (and pro-Davidic) editing, contain mockery of the kingship institution itself.¹²⁷

The entire story of Abimelech in Judges 9, for example, ridicules the concept. The story describes how the son (from a concubine) of a real hero and judge, who refused to be a king, murders his brothers, takes the throne of Shechem, and ends up slaughtering his own citizens and dying in a humiliating fashion in an attempt to conquer a nearby town. Even the name of the hero, meaning “my father is a king,” raises an eyebrow as the previous story claims that Gideon, his father, refused to be crowned as a king. And when we see how this aspiring king is described, we see how Abimelech – and apparently his aspiration and perhaps the institute itself – is being mocked.

Indeed, many biblical scholars refer to the existence of an egalitarian ethos, sometimes termed “primitive democracy,” in many biblical passages.¹²⁸ The existence of such an ethos fits the archaeological evidence, much of which has been mentioned in passing throughout the book. Examples are the simple undecorated pottery used in Israel and Judah, the extreme rarity of imported pottery (Chapter 4), the rarity of temples and temple personnel (Chapter 3), and even the planning of the LFS house (Excursus 6.1).

While such an ideology and a rejection of authority might seem strange to a modern audience, highland village societies such as

¹²⁷ This box is based on Faust 2006a; 2013; in press, with references.

¹²⁸ For example, Gordis 1971; Gottwald 1979; Sparks 2007; Berman 2008; Shapira 2009; see also Knohl 2018, and many others.

Box: (cont.)

that of Iron I Israel often stand in the way of political incorporation or unification. As Yale University anthropologist James Scott wrote:¹²⁹ “The very features of hill societies that help them evade incorporation – dispersal, mobility, ethnic complexity, small swidening groups, and egalitarianism – encourage disunity and place enormous obstacles in the way of corporate organization.” This explains why it was difficult to build the state in the highlands, and why only strong external pressure led to unification (via various mechanisms like coalescence and collective action).¹³⁰ And perhaps this is also why what emerged was not a state as such, but a stateless empire (Chapter 14). It was this empire that led to the development of the state(s).

Indeed, in the tenth century, we still don’t find evidence for stratification in the highlands, although we do find it in the areas conquered by the highland polity. Such stratification emerged in the highlands only later in the Iron Age.¹³¹ This also explains why Canaanites were needed to fill various administrative positions. Once the state did emerge, however, there was no turning back, and it, along with its accompanying traits like administration and stratification were now permanent features even in the highlands.

Still, the ideology – if not the reality – of egalitarianism and simplicity persisted in Israelite society until its collapse, and was likely even practiced in the rural sector. This ideology can be seen in various biblical passages, especially in the many material traits briefly listed earlier in this chapter that continued to the end of the Iron Age.

It existed in constant tension with the state, and the kings had to contend with it. This was expressed, if to give one glaring example, by the (apparent) lack of royal inscriptions in Israel and Judah.¹³²

¹²⁹ Scott 2009: 331.

¹³⁰ These are relevant for the time at which population gathered together into central settlements. See, for example, Kowalewski 2006; Birch 2012; 2013.

¹³¹ Faust 2012: 258–268, and references.

¹³² Compare Na’aman 2002b: 94; Rendsburg 2007; Faust in press and references.

Box: (cont.)

These were simply not viewed favorably by the population and were therefore very rare in Israelite settlements. (Such inscriptions may have been erected in non-Israelite regions, though we have no evidence for it as of yet.)

David's son Solomon, not a military person but with a gift for administration, built this empire (though he may have lost control over parts of it) into a well-oiled state with administrators and tax collectors in every region. Solomon understood how to squeeze the value out of all his subjects, like the Edomites with their copper mines, or by taxing the major highways that crossed his kingdom, and he made lucrative deals with the Phoenicians.

Then, upon Solomon's death, it all collapsed. His son Rehoboam failed to maintain control even over the Samarian highlands, let alone the Galilean tribes, while Egypt took domination over Edom and its lucrative copper trade. Rehoboam was left with only the southern territory, what the Bible calls Judah and Simeon, and part of Benjamin near Jerusalem.

A new empire suffering such a decline after two generations is well known historically: Alexander the Great's empire split upon his death, Shaka's Zulu kingdom ended during the rule of his nephew Cethshwayo, Genghis Khan's kingdom split during the rule of his grandson Kublai, and Attila's sons lost his empire in a matter of years. As we noted in Chapter 14, small, short-lived empires are the rule, not the exception.¹³³

Judah and Israel chugged on, however, unable or uninterested in turning back the clock to their simpler village lifestyles before the advent of king and state. They remained politically distinct, and even fought wars against each other from time to time, all the while remaining ethnically affiliated, sharing (one collective) identity. Israel was lost first, destroyed by Assyria in 722/720 BCE, and Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BCE.

¹³³ To this, one might add the ever-changing geopolitical circumstances. By the end of the tenth century, the traditional centers of powers of the ancient Near East began to reemerge, and it was gradually more difficult for local rulers in peripheral areas to maintain control over large areas for long. Still, this was a long process, and it is likely that the collapse of the highland polity was a result of internal processes that are part and parcel of such "circumstantial" or "incidental" empires.

CHAPTER 16

Israel's Highland Polity

An Attempt at History

NOW THAT WE HAVE DISCUSSED at length the archaeological evidence, sifted through the biblical material, looked at the anthropological literature, and tried to correlate it all into one cohesive picture, we can tell the story of Saul, David, and Solomon as we understand it, describing the historical events as they appear to have happened.

The broad outlines of the story are based on long-term processes that have been identified archaeologically and are quite straightforward. The detailed events, in contrast, are based mostly on critical analysis of the biblical narrative, and only rarely can the details be corroborated by external evidence. These, while very plausible, are more speculative. Integrating both in the light of the rich ethnographical literature allows us to reconstruct a reasonable scenario of the historical events that took place in the Land of Israel in the eleventh and tenth centuries BCE (see Figure 29).

“IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL”: SETTING THE SCENE

The 300-year period around 1200–900 BCE is often regarded as a dark age in the ancient Near East. Following the breakdown of the Late Bronze Age world order, the large political and commercial centers that dominated the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East declined, and in some cases collapsed. With no imposing power controlling the region, the land of Israel – like other regions – experienced what can be viewed as fragmentation.

Many new groups appeared on the scene, which we can divide simplistically into three "meta-groups":

- (1) **The Israelites**, a highland meta-identity, sometimes loosely defined, that evolved in the Iron Age I and encompassed many groups.
- (2) **The Philistines**, a general term for a number of groups that immigrated from somewhere in or around the Aegean world, and others who joined in and adopted this identity. They settled in the southern coastal plain.
- (3) **The Canaanites**, a generic name for the local population of the region, who did not adopt one of the previous two identities.

These, however, were meta-identities. Most groups were highly fragmented, and often more local identities (like tribal) tended to prevail.

The Israelites lived almost exclusively in small villages throughout the highlands. The bulk of the population lived in the Samarian highlands to the north, including what we call the Manassite and Ephraimite hills and the Benjamin region. The Judean hills were also heavily settled when compared to other epochs, but less densely than their northern neighbors. The Shephelah region, which would eventually become a settlement hub, was very sparsely inhabited in this period, with a handful of Canaanite villages, mostly in its eastern part.

To the west of the Shephelah region, on the Mediterranean coast, lived the Philistines. Having arrived from the Aegean, the early Philistines overcame the local Canaanites of the coastal region – probably the biblical Avvim – and established themselves as the dominant local power in Canaan. Further south, near the Beersheba Valley, Canaanites and various desert tribes probably mixed.

The Philistines themselves lived in very large, fortified cities, including Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Each city was ruled by a local *seren*, apparently an Aegean word for "king" or "ruler," though apparently they were well coordinated with each other. The Philistines brought along with them some Aegean or Aegean-like characteristics such as Aegean-inspired Monochrome/Bichrome pottery, figurines, consumption of pork as a significant component of the diet (at least some of them), and even being uncircumcised. These characteristics served to demarcate cultural and ethnic differences with the "natives," and the

Philistines increased their use during the twelfth and eleventh centuries. The rest of the southern coastal region was made up of local villages where the Canaanites/Avvim lived under the thumb of the Philistine rulers.

Farther north, especially in the valleys and the northern coastal plain, Canaanite city-states flourished – examples include Dor, Megiddo, Jokneam, Rehov, and Beth-Shean. Alongside these cities was a system of agricultural villages that were probably subordinate to the cities, perhaps paying them taxes from their produce.

The Philistines were the ultimate “other” for the Israelites. This was expressed in Israelite cultural traits, such as the avoidance of the highly distinctive Philistine pottery and by refraining from eating pork. The Philistines lived in megacities and were well organized politically and militarily, whereas the Israelite lived in small villages and did not have a strong center. It is likely that, from time to time, war leaders emerged when defense was necessary due to intergroup hostilities or periodic raids, but in general, other than trade of surpluses and perhaps joint festival celebrations, each village kept to itself. This is the period described in the book of Judges, and while the descriptions are heavily edited and based on oral traditions that are probably hyperbolic, to say the least, they do convey the overall picture of pre-monarchic Israel. Things started to change toward the end of the Iron I, as Philistine pretensions grew.

“A KING TO GOVERN US, LIKE OTHER NATIONS”: TOWARD A MONARCHY

While the Philistines probably raided the highlands throughout the period, as the eleventh century came to a close, the Philistine raids became intolerable. Even worse, these weren't merely raids anymore but attempts at establishing control over highland territories. The more sparsely settled Judah fell relatively easily under the power of the Philistines, but when the Philistines turned north and entered the more densely settled Samarian highlands, in the area we call Benjamin, they encountered serious resistance.

The first, natural reaction of the region's villagers to the Philistine raids and pressure was to concentrate in larger, central settlements and to

gradually abandon their villages. The central settlements became more suitable to face the Philistine threat, and the inhabitants even began to fortify them. The concentration of many people in the same settlements not only led to demographic growth in these sites, but also changed the social organization and increased social cohesion between different groups, further improving the population's ability to resist the Philistines.

We do not know who the first leaders were in what, in retrospect, can be understood as a move that created a more centralized power, but it is inevitable that potential leaders competed for power. According to the book of Samuel – and this is true even in what critical approaches would call its earliest layers – one such person, Saul son of Kish from Gibeah, eventually emerged as the undisputed ruler of Benjamin and eventually the whole Samarian highlands.

There is nothing surprising in the appearance of Saul as the ruler of the highland Israelites at this time since the emergence of a Saul-like leader under such circumstances is probably inevitable. As the first king of Israel and the leader of the fight against the Philistines, Saul's exploits would have been well known in his time and afterward. While the biblical authors certainly embellished his tale over time, leaving most of Saul's life shrouded in myth, certain details *seem* to be based on a real figure.

"HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE EVERYONE ELSE": SAUL, ISRAEL'S FIRST KING. Saul was a huge man, perhaps not literally "head and shoulders" above everyone else as the Bible claims, but part of his power was likely tied to his imposing physique. He was also ruthless, having slaughtered enemies in Gibeon and Nob. Whether the fights were ideologically driven, or whether they were simply examples of Saul taking out rival lineages, we do not know, but crossing Saul was clearly a dangerous business.

Saul may have struck up a relationship with an important Ephraimite wandering prophet and a local wise man named Samuel, though the accounts of this have become so filled with contradictory details, that it is difficult to determine exactly what that relationship may have been.

The story of how Saul became king over Israel was a popular subject of speculation among Israelite authors, and several competing stories survive. Certainly, he wasn't appointed by Samuel in a public meeting of all

twelve tribes in a divinatory lottery, nor is it likely that God told Samuel to choose him on the day he innocently and without ambition came looking for his father's lost donkeys. The third and oldest of the origin stories, that Saul spontaneously came to the defense of the Jabesh-gileadites in their war with Ammon, like the leaders in the book of Judges, might have a basis in history, though the story may also have been composed to explain Jabesh-gilead's loyalty to Saul in a later period – we simply do not know.

We can say with more confidence that around the turn of the first millennium, things began to change. By the time Saul was a middle-aged man, the Israelites were powerful enough to offer local military resistance to the Philistines. The Bible describes the war beginning in Geba and moving about in the region of Benjamin. While the account is almost certainly truncated, the battle that stands out is that of Michmas, following which the Philistines were chased out of Benjamin.

Saul was not going to stop at this point, however. Instead, he turned his gaze southward, expanding his reach into the territory of Judah, which until then was dominated by the Philistines.

But even if the Philistines left the highlands, in Judah, Saul encountered a new problem. The Judean highlands were overrun by groups of local brigands – some of whom perhaps previously collaborated with the Philistines. The most powerful wandering band was run by David, the youngest son of a local lineage chief from Bethlehem named Jesse.

SAUL AND DAVID. It is possible that Saul and David had an understanding at the beginning, while Saul was still establishing his dominance. Saul may even have promised David one of his daughters, though this could just as easily be a rumor David started later in his career to gain political points with Saul's followers.

In any event, even if the two did have an understanding, it didn't last long. David's main racket in his early career was selling "protection," and he wasn't about to stop because of Saul. Undoubtedly, many of the locals actually appreciated his protection; there were other brigands in the area, some of whom would have been seen as outsiders from the perspective of an Israelite. Nevertheless, many found David more of a nuisance than a savior, and they informed Saul of his behavior.

As David used the outskirts of the empty Shephelah as his base, Saul established a fortified site on Khirbet Qeiyafa to establish control over the area. This was somewhat tricky as it involved going down from the highlands and coming closer to the mighty Philistines. Still, the low hilltop did not pose a threat to the Philistines – and this was probably an important consideration as Saul did not want to provoke the megacity of Gath. Still, control of Qeiyafa gave him dominance over the pass near Adullam, making it impossible for David to use this as a crossing point from his stronghold(s) near the trough valley to the lower (and empty) parts of the Shephelah. This also blocked David's access to the coastal plain, preventing him from contacting the Philistines.¹ Saul also attempted to catch David, chasing him around Judah, but to no avail.

Fear of Saul, the Bible explains – probably correctly – brought David to make an alliance with Israel's greatest enemy, the Philistines. Realizing that it was only a matter of time before Saul caught him, David established himself as a client of King Achish, with his home base in the city of Ziklag, probably a Canaanite settlement outside of Saul's orbit of control.

From here, David continued his raids, focusing on people he considered outside of the Israelite sphere. Some percentage of this booty almost certainly went to his patron, Achish, another percentage apparently went to grease the wheels with Judahite leaders throughout the territory, and the rest made David increasingly wealthy and powerful.

SAUL: EXPANSION AND DEMISE. Meanwhile Saul continued to extend his reach. It appears that by the early tenth century, most of the central highlands were under Israelite control, but how far he got is unknown. The biggest question mark is whether he conquered the Beersheba Valley. The destruction of Tel Masos and perhaps even the founding of Arad in this period fits quite well with the biblical story of Saul conquering the city of Amalek while making an alliance with the Kenite locals. Nevertheless, archaeologically speaking, it seems just as likely that Israel conquered this region only after Saul's death.

Whether or not Saul made it this far south, it seems that he miscalculated when he attempted to extend his power north into the fertile

¹ With whom he might have had a prior contract.

Jezreel Valley. We do not know how Saul planned on dealing with the local Canaanite city-states, or whether he was hoping to incorporate the Israelite-like Galilean highlanders in his new Israelite polity. Whatever his plan, the book of Samuel states that he was stopped quickly and forcefully by a massive army of Philistines near the slopes of Mount Gilboa, where he made his last stand, during which battle he and all of his sons died.

People apparently found it difficult to believe that such a powerful warrior as Saul could have been killed by the enemy, and stories developed that he fell on his own sword to avoid being taken and humiliated. The Bible tells us that, upon finding his and Jonathan's bodies, the Philistines stuck them on the walls of Beth-Shean, after which the Jabesh-gileadites, in loyalty to Saul's memory, stole their bodies and burned them to avoid their being further desecrated. All this may be based on history, but there is no way to know.

**“THERE WAS A LONG WAR BETWEEN THE HOUSE OF SAUL
AND THE HOUSE OF DAVID”: ISRAEL'S CIVIL WAR
AND THE RISE OF DAVID**

Upon Saul's death and defeat, Israel was again thrown into chaos. Archaeology is not suitable to contribute to our understanding of the exact details, but sifting through the biblical narratives for the historical core, we see that the highlands were (again) divided between competing powers, which makes perfect sense.

Saul's general – his first cousin Abner – had one answer to the question of leadership. There was a man in Mahanaim in the Transjordan named Ishbaal (Ish-boshet), and he could rule Israel. The man even claimed to be Saul's son, though he was close to Saul's age and belonged to a different tribe. Whether anyone believed Ishbaal's claim is unknown, but it is possible that he was formerly part of Saul's military establishment, having been garrisoned in Khirbet Qeiyafa, and Abner supported him, so that was good enough.

At the same time, David also saw an opportunity, though for him there was an uphill battle. While the timeline is difficult to determine exactly, here is an approximation of what seems to have happened: Upon Saul's death, the Philistines retook at least parts of the areas captured by Saul,

especially the eastern Shephelah. They destroyed the fortified settlement in Khirbet Qeiyafa and established garrisons in Adullam and other places.

At the same time, David made contact with the various leaders in the region of Judah he had been colluding with and had himself declared king of this region (we don't think Judah was one tribe yet), with his capital in Hebron. His band also turned from brigandage and protection to the business of war; the Philistines – his former allies and overlords – were trying to stabilize their own hegemony and did not take kindly to David's aspirations. The resulting skirmishes may have been the glory days of David, with his three chief soldiers and his troop of thirty famed warriors.

Tales were told about these days involving frightening battles against monstrous Philistine men, each killed by one of David's famed warriors, such as when David's fellow Bethlehemite killed the huge Goliath of Gath, or when David's nephew Jonathan killed a six-fingered giant from the same city. We also hear about Abishai, the leader of the three, killing entire troops of Philistines on his own. What basis in fact these stories have is hard to say, but it gives us a glimpse into what David needed to do to extricate Judah from the clutches of his former ally, the king of Gath.

David was successful, however, and he soon turned his attention northward, to the rest of Israel, ruled by Ishbaal. The latter appears to have been a relatively weak leader, since it was not long before David found himself king of all Israel. How much of the biblical story here is historical, we don't know, but it seems reasonable that to counter Ishbaal's claim to be Saul's son, David would have claimed to be Saul's son-in-law.

Certainly he wasn't married to Saul's daughter at the time, but he declares that he had once been, or that she had been promised to him, or some such thing, and demands Michal brought to him as the price for Abner being permitted to join David's group and/or for Ishbaal to keep his head, depending on which version of the story one reads. According to both versions, the request is complied with, and David marries Michal, though he had to have her torn from her husband, Palti son of Laish, to do so.

Despite the compliance, both Abner and Ishbaal end up dead shortly after. The fact that the Bible spends so much energy insisting that David did not double-cross either man, and that their deaths had nothing to do with him, implies that the assassinations are based on historical incidents

and Davidic scribes needed to defend him. Whether David did indeed have a hand in their deaths is anyone's guess.

**“THE LORD GAVE VICTORY TO DAVID WHEREVER HE WENT”:
DAVID’S RAIDS, CONQUESTS, AND THE CREATION
OF A MINI-EMPIRE**

As king of all Israel, David first conquered the holdout Jebusite city of Jerusalem near the Benjamin region, something even Saul the Benjaminite failed to do, and set it up as his capital. This completed David's takeover of the highlands.

At this point, seeing that Saul's kingdom was now restored, even strengthened under their former client, the Philistines made one more attempt to establish their dominance as they did with Saul in the Jezreel Valley. This time, the battles were fought near the new capital, and it seems the outcomes were decisive. The next we hear of Philistines in the Bible, David takes from them something called Metheg-Ammah. Whatever that is (a place? an object? a status?), David finds himself without rivals in his immediate region. With no major empires to contend with – we remind the readers that for most traditional ancient Near Eastern centers this was still a dark age – he turns to expanding his rule in every direction.

Indeed, the period of David's conquests left clear archaeological marks. They are characterized by destruction layers in many urban centers, as well as by the abandonment of villages throughout large parts of the country.

We do not know the order of David's conquests – archaeology doesn't have sufficient chronological resolution, and the Bible only has an incomplete record – but we can start with the Shephelah, the area nearest to David's initial activity as a band leader. It appears that already at the earliest stages of David's rule, perhaps as a result of his previous knowledge of the peoples there, most of the Canaanite villages in this area (Tel 'Eton, Beth-shemesh, Tel Beth-Mirsim, Tel Halif) felt which way the wind was blowing and joined the Israelites.

Soon after this, probably only in the time of Solomon, new settlements began to pop up in this region, starting with Tel Zayit. Most of the new settlers were probably newcomers from the highlands, but it seems likely

that some of the Avvim joined in when the changes impacted Philistia, to which we now turn.

The major Philistine centers continued to exist, but most shrank in size, sometimes dramatically, and only Gath remained a megacity. At the same time, most of the smaller settlements in the region were abandoned. These changes were accompanied by a transformation of Philistine material culture: Most of the "foreign" traits that helped the Philistines forge a separate identity were lost, and the Philistines adopted a more Levantine culture with a Phoenician bent.

These changes are best understood as a result of the Philistines losing their dominant position in the region. With this, it appears that they lost their ambition to stand out, and, once the neighborhood bully, they became one of the neighbors. Moreover, they appear to have lost the ability to dominate the local Canaanite/Avvite population who had been living under their rule on the coast, which explains why the Philistines centers shrank in size and the villages were abandoned: the Avvim either abandoned Philistine territory or they were coerced to move.

Thus, while David did not attempt – or was unable – to fully conquer the Philistine territory, he hemmed them in from the east and (as we shall see) the north. As for Gath, David and Achish apparently came to some kind of understanding, since unlike the other Philistine cities, Gath continued to flourish in this period. Perhaps the master and vassal switched positions.

Turning south, assuming Saul hadn't already conquered the Beersheba Valley, then it was David who did so. If we continue to the southeast a bit, we arrive at the Aravah or Edom, which David also conquered. He appears to have allowed the Edomites to retain self-rule, but left a governor in charge. The importance of controlling the Edomites, and the south in general, lay with the copper-mining and smelting operations run by Edom, and with securing control over the important trade routes that crossed the region.

David continued north into the Transjordan, inflicting havoc in Moab, and eventually Ammon – as the Ammonites abandoned their villages and put up a strong defense of their capital city of Rabbah (modern-day Amman). The Bible claims that originally, David intended to build an alliance with Ammon, but they offended his ambassadors, sparking a conflict. Whether this was the case, we have no way to know.

Settlements throughout Ammon and Moab were abandoned at this time, apparently due to David's raids or even conquests. The abandonment of many sites in these regions (and elsewhere) resulted from both direct impact by the campaigns as well as by the insecurity that resulted from raids. The effect was like a *mini-mfecane*, a Zulu term describing the waves of abandonment and desolation that resulted from raids and campaigns in nineteenth-century CE southeast Africa (Chapter 14).

In contrast to his treatment of Ammon and Moab, David apparently incorporated the Mishor and the Gilead into Israel. Here we see an important policy decision that David made, whether consciously or naturally: Peoples viewed as outsiders were ruled as clients or were subject to periodic raiding and were often treated harshly, while groups seen as more or less culturally the same as Israel became part of Israel. Thus David did not simply rule over the Gilead or the Mishor, but incorporated the population into Israel as a brother tribe or clan.

David's thinking here was not unique to him. Ethnographically speaking, this is what conquerors like David usually do: They expand their base with similar groups while maintaining distance from others who will be cast as outsiders. The number of those who were counted as "Israel" grew exponentially from this policy, similar to the number of "Mongols" in the time of Genghis Khan, or of "Zulus" in the time of Shaka.

Returning to the Cisjordan, having defeated the Philistines, David took control of the sparsely settled central coastal plain (the Sharon). This region serves as an outlet to the sea. In the process, David destroyed cities like Tel Qasile and (apparently) even Gezer further inland (though the Bible ascribes this last conquest to the Egyptian pharaoh). He even succeeds in doing exactly what Saul tried and failed to do: He takes over the Jezreel Valley. This area was strategically important since it served as the main highway from the east to the Mediterranean Coast, and it was also extremely fertile land.

To establish control of this area, David needed to conquer the local Canaanite city-states. Megiddo and Yokneam bore the brunt of this attack; the former was destroyed almost totally. Beth-Shean, in the nearby Beth-Shean Valley, was also conquered, but the destruction was only partial, and Tel Rehov apparently welcomed David, or at least surrendered convincingly. This can be seen by both the lack of evidence

for destruction and the overall continuity in the Canaanite nature of the settlement. Other cities in and near the valleys, like Kinrot, Tel Rekhes, and even Abel-beth-ma'achah further north, were also destroyed.

David also took control of the Galilean highlands. Here again, some cities were destroyed and many villages were abandoned (or destroyed). In the hilly region, David encountered tribes of people very similar to his own, and they too were incorporated in the polity of Israel and their history/stories became part of Israel's stories. (Just think of the war against Sisera led by Barak from the northern tribe of Naphtali and supported by Deborah, described as a prophetess from the tribe of Ephraim.) The Canaanites of the intermountain valleys of the Lower Galilee, in contrast, were treated harshly.

David also seems to have had a complex relationship with the Aramean kingdoms to Israel's north. According to the Bible, he conquered Damascus and turned it into a client; he fought Hadadezer, the king of Zobah, but did not conquer him, and made an alliance with Toi, the king of Hamath. We can say nothing about this expansion or control archaeologically, but Toi's existence, at least, was confirmed by epigraphic sources.

Most significant is the relationship David builds with Geshur, an Aramean polity near the Sea of Galilee, adjacent to David's kingdom. In this case, we are told that David married the daughter of the king of Geshur, a standard practice among allied kings throughout history.

We must emphasize that many of David's campaigns were probably no more than large-scale raids leading to devastation and even creating waves of abandonment over large areas, but not all these territories were actually captured and held by him on a permanent basis.

As we noted, the hallmarks of David's rule are his conquests and expansion, but a few additional observations are worth making: Unlike Saul, who essentially ruled his small kingdom from his hometown without a real administration other than family members, David formed a bare-bones administration and founded a new capital city. He also appears to have had an army that included foreign mercenary troops – Keritites and Pelitites (perhaps Philistine mercenaries) and a unit under a Philistine from Gath named Itai.

Interestingly, the Bible doesn't describe David as great builder; he did not even build a temple to Israel's God. The fact that the book of Samuel spends an entire chapter (2 Sam. 7) explaining why he didn't and defending this as God's will is good evidence that this is historically accurate. A unique building activity ascribed to him is, not surprisingly, the construction of a cedar palace in Jerusalem. While we do not know if this is accurate, the findings in Jerusalem do point to reuse if not expansion of an impressive palace complex inherited from the conquered Jebusites.²

In addition to his conquests, the Bible has a lot to say about David's home life. Much of 2 Samuel and the opening of Kings are spent on the affair with Bathsheba, Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom's revenge and his eventual rebellion, and the conflict between Solomon and Adonijah. It is very difficult to evaluate all of this historically, and the safest thing to say is that we have little idea if any of it happened or how.

That said, we can make some observations. Competition among sons for succession is commonplace in royal families, so the fights between Amnon and Absalom and between Adonijah and Solomon could very well be based on real conflicts. Absalom, as the grandson of the king of Geshur, may well have thought his claim to the throne was the greatest, and the fact that the story emphasizes time and time again that David did not want Absalom killed implies that the authors were defending David and that the "scandal" was real.

The story of Bathsheba sounds very much like an anti-Solomon polemic, and thus, even if it is illusory, she was likely a real person, and there was something about her that opponents of Solomon (from Adonijah's camp?) could latch on to to imply that Solomon's parentage wasn't fully kosher.

In a similar way, the story of David's deathbed promise to Bathsheba and Solomon reads like a piece of pro-Solomon propaganda to counter claims that he was not the legitimate heir. Given these rival polemics, it would seem that Solomon and Adonijah competed for the throne and Solomon won.

² David might have also built a few governor's residences, perhaps at Tel 'Eton and KEN.

**“JUDAH AND ISRAEL LIVED IN SAFETY, FROM DAN EVEN
TO BEERSHEBA”: SOLOMON BUILDS A STATE**

That Solomon was the wisest man of his time is likely hyperbole, but like his father – and in contrast to the way he is described in Joseph Heller’s bestseller, *God Knows* – Solomon was a highly competent king. Nevertheless, his goals were quite different than David’s.³

Although we do hear of Solomon maintaining an enormous number of horses, we never hear of him going to war. Instead, he is depicted as a classic builder and administrator who preferred to focus on consolidation. This took several forms, and while many of the details can be learned only from the texts, the broader picture of construction and trade is clearly reflected in the archaeological record (e.g., Chapter 3, and Part II).

According to the Bible, Solomon subdivided his kingdom into districts, partly based on existing tribal units and partly incorporating the non-Israelite regions David had conquered. The Bible tells us that these districts were in charge of supporting the government one month a year. This took care of the king’s expenses – lavish according to the Bible – and also his building projects.

On this latter point, we have more than just the Bible’s description. The cities of Megiddo, Yokneam, Hazor, Gezer, and perhaps also Tel Qasile and Abel-beth-ma’achah – to name just a few – were all rebuilt in this period, some with the “Solomonic” six-chambered gates. Moreover, some, like Megiddo, were rebuilt as administrative centers, ostensibly overseeing the work of local farmers and ensuring revenue streams through taxes and/or corvée labor. That these cities were indeed built by the kingdom of Israel and not rebuilt by the previous Canaanite inhabitants, is evidenced by a number of factors:

- The new cities were built without temples. Even when older temples persisted for generations (Tel Qasile and Beth-Shean), or even for a few millennia (as in Megiddo), they were not rebuilt. This, along with the lack of any evidence for building new ones, directs us to the Israelites as the only candidates for building the new cities (Excursus 8.1).

³ The chronological distinction between David the conqueror and Solomon the builder is of course schematic, and the developments were gradual.

- In quite a few new sites, we now find governors' mansions in the LFS style, emphasizing the dominant presence of the Israelites in these new territories.⁴

As part of his new administrative schemes, and in an attempt to exploit the conquered regions, Solomon sometimes resettled inhabitants of the conquered cities in outlying villages in the northern valleys. This can be seen most clearly in Megiddo, which, when rebuilt, was composed mainly of public buildings, with many of its previous inhabitants settled elsewhere in newly established villages (similar to Nir David). This completed the dramatic change in settlement patterns initiated in the time of David.

Whether Jerusalem itself was built up with an enormous palace is unclear, and as for the temple, we are limited in what we can determine since no archaeological excavations can be carried out on the Temple Mount. Still, the recent excavation of a massive tenth-century city wall in the Ophel area shows that Jerusalem did expand at the time. Furthermore, the inclusion of the Ophel within the city's boundaries suggests that the Temple Mount – which is much higher than the Ophel – must have also been incorporated within the city; otherwise, the lower Ophel would have been defenseless, making the wall pointless. This provides indirect support to the claim that Solomon built the Temple.

According to the Bible, Solomon's time as king was marked by Israel's great wealth. In addition to taxes and tribute payments from clients, he accumulated wealth by controlling trade routes, including the spice and copper trade routes. Both of these routes crossed the region, and Solomon was able to dominate them (1) indirectly, by his control over Edom, and (2) directly, through his control of the Negev Highlands, where he conducted an aggressive settlement program in which various displaced groups were settled along with some Israelites.

The excavations of 'En Hazeva exposed remains from this period, remnants of biblical Tamar, which bridged the mines at Feinan and the Negev Highland settlement system. Settlement in these regions meant that the Arabian spice trade needed to pass through Israelite territory and pay taxes, of course. Edom itself was, as noted, perhaps ruled by

⁴ It is possible that David had already carried out some of the construction.

Israel only indirectly, but it appears that an Israelite governor or ambassador lived in Kh. en-Nahas (KEN) at Feinan, in one of the copper-producing sites, and protected Israel's political and financial interests there.

The Bible also informs us about the close partnership between Solomon and Hiram, the king of Tyre. Given what we presented about the extent of Solomon's kingdom and his control over trade routes, this is likely rooted in history. Archeological evidence suggests that Solomon made sure to send much of the spices and copper north to the Phoenician traders. Tyre was an economic powerhouse, and Israel not only controlled some of the trade routes that supplied Tyre with needed luxury goods, but also served as its agricultural hinterland. This was profitable to both sides.

Israel also developed its own port system in the Yarkon area and perhaps elsewhere on the Sharon Plain. Those probably served mainly as anchorages for Phoenician ships, but were also the gate through which various imports – for example, cedars – entered the kingdom.

During Solomon's reign, Israel came into its own as a state. The increased social complexity and hierarchy is expressed in various material changes like the new pottery forms and assemblages. Although these started before Solomon's time, they climaxed in this period. Instead of simple local productions with a limited repertoire, the pottery became more standardized, with a larger repertoire. Moreover, the potters started using slip and burnish on their serving utensils, indirectly probably reflecting increased gender hierarchy, which is common in state societies.

The evidence briefly recounted earlier in this chapter fits not only with the general description of Solomon's policies, but also with the various lists of ministers and officials, districts, and the like, which testify to the administrative nature of his rule and which were far more sophisticated than those of David.

Before we move to the decline of the this "mini-empire," we must stress that although there is clear evidence for both international connections and major construction activities at the time, these are fairly modest compared to what we see in Hollywood movies, or in comparison to what we know from larger, long-existing empires. Still, the finds are clearly impressive for this place and age.

“TORE THE KINGDOM AWAY FROM THE HOUSE OF DAVID”: THE DECLINE OF THE HIGHLAND POLITY

As is often the case with such mini-empires, the kingdom lasted only a short time. The biblical account emphasizes a fault line between Judah/the south and the other tribes. The Bible claims that the schism began in the time of David with the rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri. This story is stylized and hard to accept as historical, though perhaps it reflects a natural political rift between the southern region that became the home territory of the Davidides and the rest of Israel. In any case, the Sheba rebellion story mimics that of the northern rebellion in the time of Rehoboam.

In that story, we hear that Solomon's son inherited all his father's avarice but none of his intelligence or talent. He thus quickly alienated the northern tribes with his tough talk about heavy taxes, and the country split in two, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Whether the northern rebellion was led by Jeroboam, or whether he took power in the vacuum is unclear from the conflicting biblical accounts, although his connection to the Egyptian pharaoh, Shishak, seems real.

At the same time, the weakened and divided Israel/Judah lost its domination over Damascus and Edom. The former, probably very loose to start with, became independent, and the latter fell under the sway of Egypt. In one version of this story, the loss of the vassals happened already in the time of Solomon, but if so, it must have happened very late in Solomon's reign.

Whatever the case, early in Rehoboam's reign, Pharaoh Shishak marched through the region. While he destroyed some cities in the north, his major known impact was in the south. Here, he took over the copper production and destroyed some of the Negev settlements whose populations slowly began to shrink. Many of the remaining inhabitants, whose origins were diverse, but who amalgamated and adopted a new identity – that of Simeon – moved north to the (ecologically better) Beersheba Valley and its environs.

Shishak is important because his appearance symbolizes the future resurrection of the traditional centers of power (although, ironically, Egypt itself was not going to be an especially powerful one), and

therefore the inevitable decline of the polities that emerged in fringe areas, of which the highland polity is perhaps the best example.

Indeed, such a rapid disintegration of an empire created by a charismatic leader during unique and opportune circumstances is not surprising; on the contrary, most opportunistic empires created in a similar fashion lasted only about a generation or two after the death of their founder, as can be seen in the Mongol, Hun, and Zulu empires.

The northern kingdom existed for nearly 200 years, until Assyria destroyed it in 722/720 BCE, while Judah survived more than a century longer, succumbing to a Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE. From the splitting of the kingdom until their respective destructions, both of these remained states; neither reverted to decentralized village life without a king or political hierarchy. In that sense, and in many other ways, the revolution of Saul, David, and Solomon left its permanent mark on Israelite society.

Afterword

WE HAVE SEEN THAT SAUL, DAVID, and Solomon were historical figures. Despite the many exaggerations and later elaborations on their accomplishments and vices, which became part and parcel of the biblical account, the early layers of the biblical text are based on a historical core that appears to be accurate in its broad strokes. The profusion of archaeological data that has accumulated over the past few decades, including the wide-scale abandonment of villages, destroyed cities, new construction, and even changes in pottery styles, which we have described in detail to the reader, presents a nuanced portrait of the process that brought about the materialization of the first Israelite kingdom, and gives us insights into how the various rulers came to power and how each of them ruled.

In the end, it is certainly possible to quibble on a given interpretation or explain one or another data point in a different way, but the strength of the reconstruction proposed here is in its ability to explain so many archaeological phenomena with one coherent scenario. Moreover, this scenario fits well with what can be expected in such circumstances on the basis of anthropology, and it is in line with the findings of biblical source criticism, which unravels the various layers of the biblical stories of Saul, David, and Solomon and allows us to see the earliest core and the stages of the story's development.

We know that our suggested reconstruction goes against the *Zeitgeist* of contemporary biblical studies. If until some thirty years ago no biblical scholar doubted the existence of Saul, David, and Solomon, and there was a wide agreement that at least some of the relevant texts were written at the time in which they ruled or shortly thereafter, this has all changed.

Mainstream biblical scholarship adopted some of the skepticism which ran rampant in the 1990s, as well as the low chronology, popular among a significant minority of Iron Age archaeologists.

Nevertheless, we think the findings speak for themselves and provide us with a sort of middle ground between the overly skeptical approaches that have come to dominate biblical scholarship and overly traditional readings of the biblical narrative still popular in conservative circles. Though it is always difficult to predict where a given field will head, it is our contention that the wind has already begun to blow, if very gently, in this direction, and within the coming years, the so-called United Monarchy will again be seen as an historical entity.

Indeed, our reconstruction solves another problem that scholars of the field – or anyone who peruses various popular books and articles on Iron Age Israel – will come across, namely the dating of biblical texts that, until the 1990s, were dated to the period of the United Monarchy or shortly thereafter. Once it became accepted wisdom that the United Monarchy was a mythic construct, any text once thought to be composed around this period had to be dated later – but to when?

If the list of Solomon's districts was not based on archives from the time of Solomon, when was it composed and what were the author's considerations in dividing up the land and naming the governors as he did? If the attempts to paint Saul's animosity toward David as an unwarranted result of madness was not an apologetic stance of the pro-Davidic dynasty scribes, in a time when the memory of Israel's first king remained fresh, when were these stories composed and to what end?

Attempts to explain these and other anomalies, especially the dating of the various lists, fall all over the map and the relevant texts are dated anywhere from the eighth century BCE to the Hellenistic period, creating an impression that anything goes. While it is certainly legitimate to explore multiple options, it is hard to avoid the feeling that the cancellation of the tenth century as an option has forced some scholars to construct artificial speculations to avoid the more natural answer.

At a lecture not long ago, one of the authors noted that labeling a text pre-Deuteronomistic doesn't give a precise date – that it could have been composed in the seventh, eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries BCE. As he

noted the various options for when it could have been composed, an important biblical scholar in the audience was nodding in agreement up until the point when he mentioned the tenth century, in response to which she shook her head to indicate that this, alas, was impossible. His response – and she confirmed it – was that this reaction was not based on any internal mechanism of dating biblical texts, but rather relied on the stifling assumption many biblical scholars now take for granted, which is that archaeology simply doesn't allow for a United Monarchy. It is our sincere hope that this book will help remove these shackles from biblical scholars and historians.

Naturally, academic disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, and biblical criticism can't be used to validate the biblical account as is, and such an endeavor was never our aim. Instead, our goal here is to make use of these disciplines to get as close as we can, given current knowledge, to what really happened in this period. Certainly future finds and studies will adjust this or that conclusion in what will likely be a never-ending process of improved approximation, but we are confident that our work here takes a fruitful step in the right direction.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLE?

We opened this book noting the importance of David and Solomon in Western civilization, which is, after all, built upon what is often called the Judeo-Christian tradition. But this tradition is based on the biblical accounts, not on academic reconstructions working with archaeology, source criticism, and ethnography.

Even though, academically speaking, our study can be characterized as falling out somewhere in the middle of the road between the conservative and skeptical sides – even leaning a bit toward the conservative side – the average reader may still wonder what is left of their biblical heroes. What difference does it make that the broad outlines of the narrative are historical and that Saul, David, and Solomon lived and ruled over the highland polity, if Saul, at the same time, didn't end up as a king when innocently looking for his father's donkeys, David never killed the giant Goliath, and Solomon wasn't superhumanly wise and wealthy? Aren't we losing the soul of the story?

Here we would like to follow an interesting observation made by Jewish thinker Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (1856–1927), better known as Ahad Ha'am. In 1904, Ahad Ha'am published an article called "Moses" in which he addressed the controversy over whether Moses was a historical figure. His contribution to this debate was his distinction between two types of what we might call today historical truths. The first is the "real," scientific or academic truth (or history) – that is, whether (in our case) a biblical description is literally accurate. He called this archaeological truth, but since today the term has a different meaning, we prefer to call it academic truth. The second type refers to the way in which people understood and perceived history, and their subsequent actions, which created (and recreated) history. He called this historical truth because it refers to the real forces that shaped history (cf. mnemohistorical truth – i.e., the truth of cultural memory).

Ahad Ha'am argued that even if Moses never existed in history, as a literary figure, Moses changed history. Moses is the central figure in Judaism, the first lawgiver in a millennia-old legal tradition. The account of his bringing the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage served as a powerful model for antislavery activists in later times, and for figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who repeated the words of Moses to Pharaoh in his famous "Let My People Go" speech, delivered on Human Rights Day (December 10) in 1965. These same words ignited crowds when used in the call to release the Jews from the clutches of the Soviet Union.

The same is true when it comes to Saul, David, and Solomon. To take one example, even though, academically speaking, David most likely did not kill Goliath, this does not undo the power of the story of the young lad, armed only with a slingshot and trusting in God, defeating a huge, armor-clad warrior. The memory of David's victory over Goliath against all odds inspired generations, motivating history and shaping it.

Around the time of the Protestant revolutions, standing up to the powerful pope in Rome was seen as a David-versus-Goliath conflict. The same was said about the American colonies defying Britain and about the newly born Israel fighting off five invading armies in 1948 and its continued struggle afterward in a hostile environment. Contemporary author Malcolm Gladwell used the metaphor of David versus Goliath for his 2013 bestselling *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of*

Battling Giants. Thus the story of David killing Goliath remains an important part of Western culture, creating and motivating history, whether or not David actually fought and killed Goliath with a slingshot.

At the same time, the significance and power of the story doesn't negate the importance of studying history in a more scientific manner. Many wish to engage the Bible and its traditions on that level, to see what we can know about the historical Saul, David, and Solomon, how the stories surrounding them evolved, and what really happened 3,000 years ago. This book is intended for such readers – whether as lovers of Bible, history, archaeology, or all three. We hope that we have succeeded in granting readers access to these historical characters whose memories pervade the biblical text and remain vital even today.

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