

The “United Monarchy” on the Ground: The Disruptive Character of the Iron Age I–II Transition and the Nature of Political Transformations

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Abstract

It is commonly agreed that the Iron Age I–II transition was gradual and that processes of social complexity initiated in the Iron Age I simply matured in the Iron Age II. The emergence of Levantine kingdoms – whether the so-called “United Monarchy” (i.e., the highland polity) or other polities – was therefore seen as an outcome of this gradual maturation, even if the date of their emergence is hotly debated. The present paper challenges both the perceived gradual nature of Iron Age complexity and the dated understanding of state formation processes that lies behind the common scholarly reconstructions of Iron Age political developments. Instead, the paper shows that the Iron Age I–II transition was troubled and was accompanied by drastic changes in many parameters, whether settlement patterns, settlement forms, or various material traits. Acknowledging these transformations is therefore the first step in understanding the process through which local kingdoms emerged. The main part of the paper briefly outlines these changes, which are later incorporated into a suggested historical scenario, reconstructing the processes leading to the emergence of the monarchy in Iron Age Israel and accompanying it. The final part of the paper briefly embeds these processes within a broader discussion of state formation in general and within the debate about the highland polity

Avraham Faust: The “United Monarchy” on the Ground: The Disruptive Character of the Iron Age I–II Transition and the Nature of Political Transformations, in A. Faust, Y. Garfinkel and M. Mumcuoglu (eds.) *State Formation Processes in the 10th Century BCE Levant (Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology 1)*: 15–67.

ISSN: 2788-8819; <https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00001.2>; <https://openscholar.huji.ac.il/jjar>



(the “United Monarchy”) in particular, and reconstructs the emergence and expansion of the latter.

KEYWORDS: United Monarchy, highland polity, Iron Age I–II transition, state formation, abandonment, social complexity, “empire before the state”

1. Introduction

The historicity of the “United Monarchy” (i.e., the nascent Israelite highland polity) is currently one of the hottest debates in biblical archaeology.¹ While it is commonly agreed that the Iron Age Levantine kingdoms emerged following a long process of growing social complexity that began in the early Iron Age I and matured in the Iron Age II, there is a growing debate over the time during which this complexity (or “statehood”) was achieved, as well as the geographical scope of the various states that developed.

The present paper will challenge both the perceived gradual nature of Iron Age complexity and the dated understanding of state formation processes that lies behind the common scholarly reconstructions of Iron Age political developments. A better understanding of the processes that resulted in social complexity will shed new light on the time and manner in which the Iron Age polities were created in general, and on the historicity of the so-called “United Monarchy” (i.e., the highland polity) in particular.

The Iron Age I was a formative period throughout the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean: many of the older centers of power collapsed, or at least declined, and the region went through a period of fragmentation, with new ethnic groups emerging in various parts of the region. The Iron Age II witnessed both the resurgence of some of the older centers of power, for example in Mesopotamia, and the emergence of new kingdoms in the Levant, based to a large extent on the groups that appeared on the scene in the Iron Age I. What was the background

1. The term “United Monarchy” is a scholarly construct used to define the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, which ruled over “all” the Israelites rather than only some of them; it is often used to designate a rule over all the territories and groups that later became the separate kingdoms of Israel or Judah. I must stress that I use it here as a general, generic term for the kingdom that the Bible attributes to Saul, David, and Solomon; I do not take the word “united” to refer to a united “Israel” and “Judah,” as I consider the latter title 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; Faust and Farber forthcoming; see also Leonard-Fleckman 2015). In this article I use the term only sparingly in this generic meaning, and will mainly use the term “highland polity” to refer to this nascent political formation.

for the emergence of the new polities in this region, and how were they formed? How are we to understand the nature of the transition between the Iron Age I and the Iron Age II?

There is general agreement that the transition was gradual and that processes of social complexity that were initiated in the Iron Age I simply matured at some point in the Iron Age II (see, e.g., Frick 1985; Coote and Whitelam 1987; Na’aman 1996: 23; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 130–132). The emergence of the state, or the Israelite monarchy(ies), has therefore been seen as an outcome of this maturity, pretty much in line with the neo-evolutionary perceptions that were very popular at the time. Thus, until some twenty years ago it was accepted that the threshold of statehood was reached in the early part of the Iron Age II, unanimously dated at the time to the 10th century BCE. In the 1990s, however, doubts were raised, first regarding the relative point in time in which settlement, culture, and society became sufficiently complex to justify the use of the term statehood, and later about the exact date of the Iron Age I–II transition and hence the absolute timing of this social complexity. Neither of these challenges has yet been entirely laid to rest, and both limit our ability to reach a consensus regarding the point in time when Iron Age society was complex enough to justify the application of the term “state” and its accompanying baggage.²

While I do believe, despite the debates, that there is sufficient evidence for both the identification of Iron Age social complexity and dating it, in this paper I would like to approach the debate from a completely different angle, and to challenge the basic assumption that the path to social complexity was gradual and that one can simply choose this or that point along this gradual development and suggest that this is when statehood was achieved. Rather, I intend to show that the Iron Age I–II transition was troubled, and that if we look at the archaeological evidence independently we witness a major crisis in many parameters, whether settlement patterns, settlement forms, or various material traits. These changes are both a result and a cause of the social transformations that are also

2. The term “state” is an etic term used to define a certain level of complexity or a type of socio-political organization, commonly understood to include at least tens of thousands of people, ruled by a king (or whatever the term is) supported by some sort of army or police that backs the ruler’s policies and organized around a class-based hierarchy, with at least some bureaucracy (e.g., Renfrew and Bahn 2016: 182). The use of the term itself is of course justified only as long as we remember that it represents an ideal type (with which many “states” would not necessarily conform) and that it is an etic term (more below). Still, for reasons briefly addressed at the end of the article, I prefer not to use the terms “state” or “state formation process” in this specific context.

manifested in the emergence of the kingdoms, and they point us toward the time in which it occurred. Hence, instead of arbitrarily attempting to choose a point along a continuum, the data themselves suggests a narrower time-frame for the emergence of the kingdoms.

Acknowledging these major transformations is therefore the first step in understanding the process through which the Levantine kingdoms emerged, and addressing them will allow us to understand the developments that accompanied the appearance of the monarchy in ancient Israel, and consequently to date it. The first part of this paper will therefore outline these changes, from settlement patterns at large and in various sub-regions, through changes in settlement forms, to the transformation of some aspects of material culture. The second part of the paper will attempt to incorporate the various changes into a coherent historical scenario, outlining the processes leading to the emergence of the monarchy in Iron Age Israel and accompanying it, as well as the date of the processes and their geographical scope (i.e., the regions involved or impacted). The final part of the paper will briefly summarize the process leading to the formation of the monarchy and will succinctly embed it within a broader discussion of state formation in general and within the debate about the “united monarchy” in particular.

2. The Iron Age I–II Transition: The Material Evidence

2.1. The vanishing countryside: settlement patterns in the wake of the first millennium BCE

An examination of the data from well over one hundred excavated³ Iron Age rural sites (Fig. 1) reveals a clear pattern whereby the rural sector experienced a major crisis at the time discussed here before gradually recovering in the later phases of the Iron Age II, mainly in the 8th–7th century BCE (Fig. 2). Over a few generations, covering the later part of the Iron Age I and the early decades of the Iron Age II, almost all the excavated Iron Age I rural sites ceased to exist as rural sites. In the highlands, for example, most of the famous highland “settlement” sites like ‘Izbet Sartah, Giloh, ‘Ai, Kh. Raddana, Kh. Za‘akuka, and many others⁴ were abandoned

3. Here, and below, I will rely almost exclusively on the results of excavations rather than on surveys, which are not sufficiently reliable in general, and especially with regard to the Iron Age IIA (e.g., Faust and Safrai 2005; 2015: 8–15, with many references); note, however, that a careful analysis of the surveys (Faust 2007a) supports the reconstruction presented here.

4. This seems to be the case as well for at least some of the Iron Age I Jordan Valley sites studied by Zertal and his team (e.g., Ben-Yosef 2017), but more data is needed to reach firm conclusions.

in the closing years of the Iron Age I. Only a few of these rural sites continued to exist for more than a few decades into the Iron Age II, and they all became central sites – towns or cities – at some stage in the Iron Age IIA (probably early in the period, but this cannot always be ascertained archaeologically), for example at Tell en-Nasbeh (Mizpah), Bethel, and others (Faust 2003; 2007a; 2015a; *contra* Finkelstein 2005). Similarly, abandonment of rural sites, usually during the first generation or two of the Iron Age IIA, is characteristic of most other regions outside the highlands, including Philistia (see Faust 2013; 2020a, and many references), the Beersheba-Arad valleys (Herzog 1994; Finkelstein 1995), the Lower Galilee (Gal 1992), and Moab (Routledge 2004; Routledge et al. 2014).

Furthermore, the vast majority of the excavated Iron Age II rural sites, for example Kh. Jemein, Beit Aryeh, Kh. Jarish, and dozens of others, were established *de novo* in the 9th and mainly the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, and do not continue Iron Age I rural sites. The only region in which abandonment was partial and there is evidence for some continuity in the rural sector is the northern valleys, a topic that will be discussed below (for an overview, see Faust 2015a).

Interestingly, the abandonment process shows a clear pattern in which the earlier abandonments were in the highlands (already in the later part of the Iron Age I), whereas those in the surrounding areas mainly occurred a generation or two later (in the early decades of the Iron Age II) (Fig. 3). Previously, given this chronological and spatial patterns, and in light of additional evidence, I have suggested that insecurity in the highlands caused the first phase of abandonment, which led to the concentration of the population in a few central sites that consequently became larger and better fitted to face an external threat (Faust 2003; 2006a; 2015a). This was interpreted as a major part of the process that led to growing complexity in the central highlands and subsequently to the emergence of the monarchy. The second phase of the abandonment, taking place mainly outside the highlands (e.g., in Philistia; see below), was a result of the interactions that accompanied the actions of the new polity (below).⁵

5. After I first presented the pattern (Faust 2003) it was challenged by Finkelstein (2005), but the accumulating evidence clearly shows that the pattern is indeed real and that there was a break in rural settlement during the Iron Age I–II transition (see Faust 2007a; 2015a). Thus, while it is likely that more small sites that existed continuously will be discovered in the future, this is unlikely to affect the overall pattern.

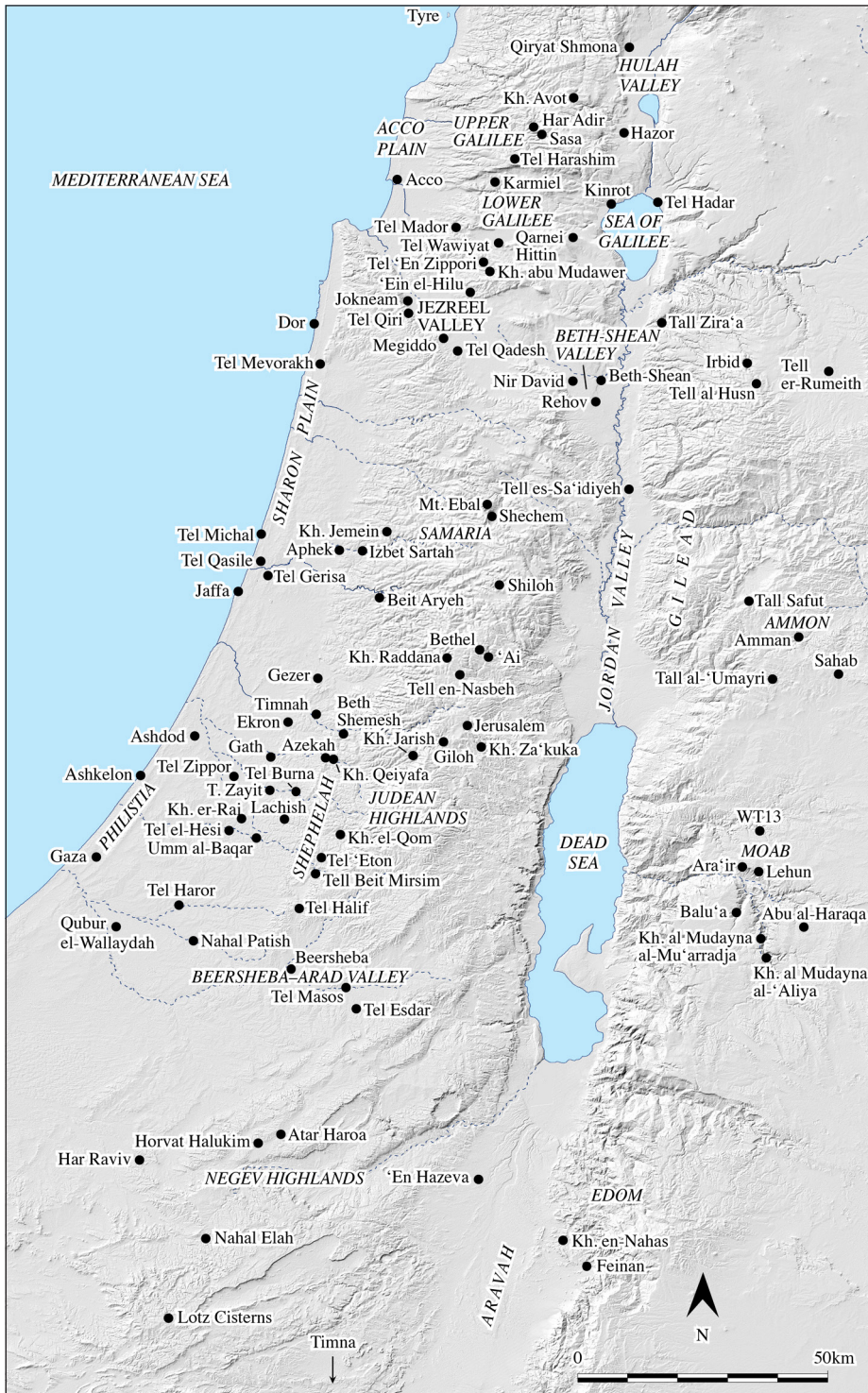


Fig. 1. Map showing sites mentioned in the text (prepared by Charles Wilson).

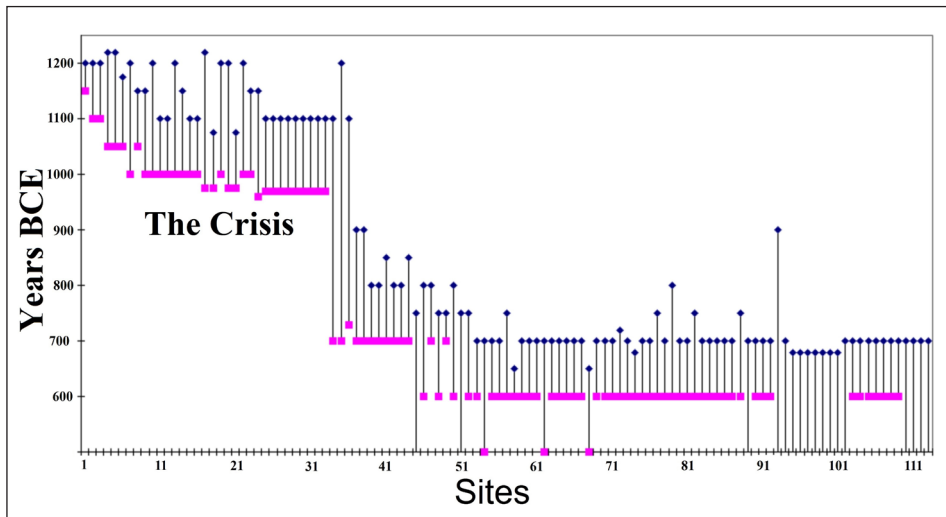


Fig. 2. The history of the rural sector during the Iron Age. The graph represents excavated Iron Age rural settlements. The Y axis represents the chronology, i.e., the periods in which the site was occupied. Note that while the date of destruction is usually quite accurate, the date of establishment is less secure due to various site-formation processes and is only a rough approximation. The sites along the X axis are organized roughly from earlier on the left to later on the right.

2.2. The Beginning of Urbanization and Changes in Settlement Forms

Indeed, in many specific excavated sites we witness transformations toward more complexity in the Iron Age IIA. Sites that were mere villages in the Iron Age I and became towns or cities in the Iron Age IIA include (partial list) Tell en-Nasbeh (Zorn 1993), Tel ‘Eton (Faust and Sapir 2018), Beth-Shemesh (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016), and many others.⁶ Other sites that were not inhabited at all in the Iron Age I were established as cities in the early Iron Age IIA, for example Lachish (Ussishkin 2014: 203–205; Garfinkel et al. 2019a),⁷ Hazor (Ben-Tor 2016: 132–146),⁸ Tel Mador and Tel Qarne Hittin (Gal 1992: 36–47), and others. Additionally, drastic changes can be seen in many sites that were already towns or cities during the Iron Age I, like Jokneam (Ben-Tor 1993), Megiddo (Ussishkin 2017: 261–268; Halpern 2000), and Tel Qasile (Mazar 1985: 127–128), some of which will be discussed in more detail below.

6. The fortified city of Beersheba V was apparently built only later in the Iron Age IIA (Mazar 2005: 22; Herzog 2016: 29), but other changes in this site took place there in the early Iron Age IIA.

7. Apparently only in a later phase of the early Iron Age IIA.

8. Although a small Iron Age I village existed on the mound, the city of the 10th century BCE seems to be a new creation rather than a mere enlargement of an existing site, and hence it should also be listed in this group.

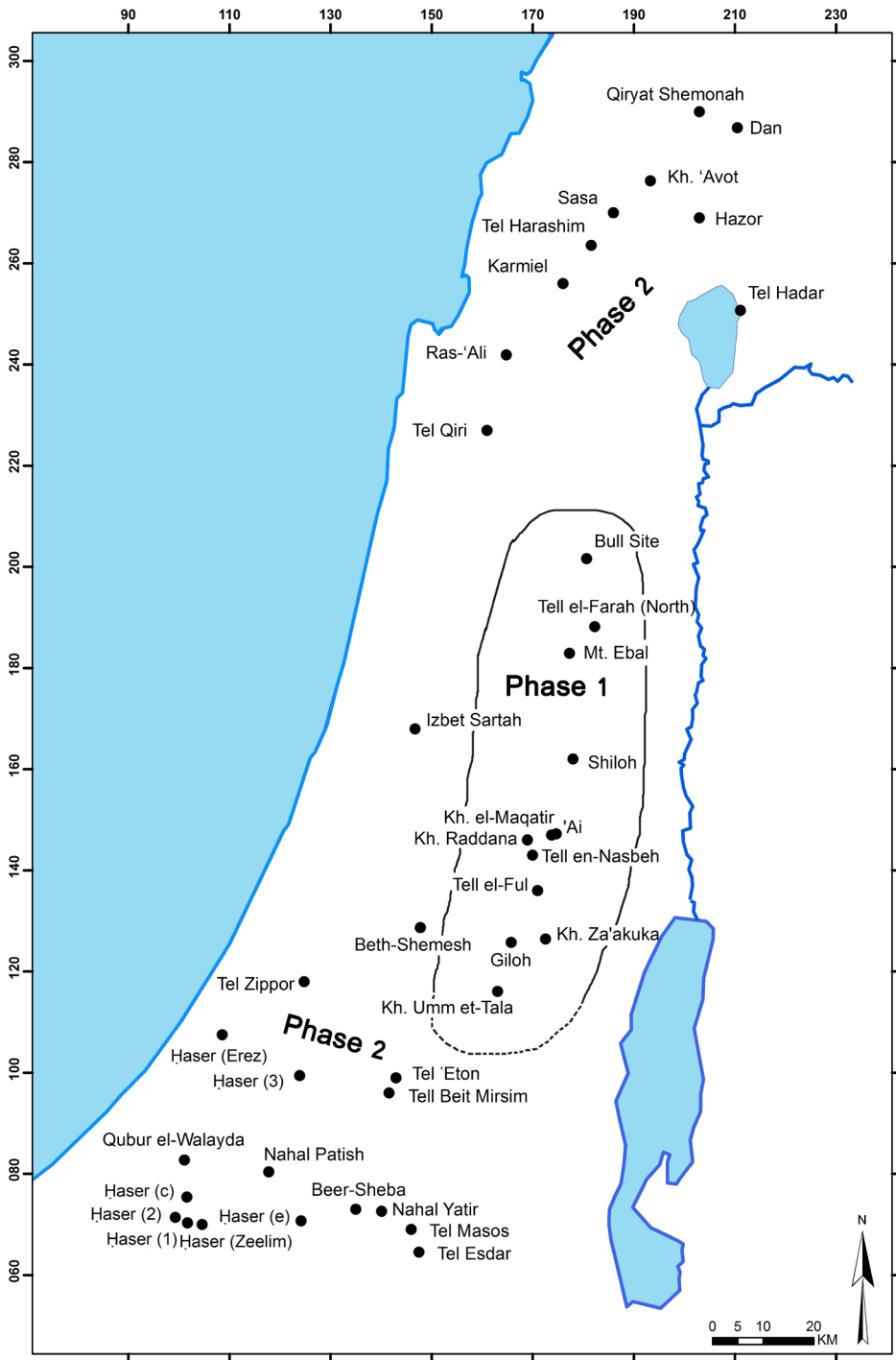


Fig. 3. Map showing the process of abandonment of rural settlements during the Iron Age I-II transition. Note that Phase 1 took place mainly in parts of the highlands, and it was only later that most sites in other parts of the country were abandoned.

The changes are not uniform and we cannot review all the evidence here, but urban sites were clearly also affected and experienced change during the Iron Age I–II transition and the early phase of the Iron Age IIA (more below).

2.3. Regional Changes

While the above-described changes in rural settlement were evidently quite drastic in the highlands, they are attested throughout the country, and it must be stressed that most regions experienced broad changes, rather than just gradual developments, in the transition to the Iron Age II.

The Shephelah. This region was settled only sparsely in the Iron Age I (Faust 2013b) with only a handful of villages, mostly scattered in its eastern part, in or near the trough valley (i.e., Tel Beth-Shemesh, Tel Yarmuth, Tel ‘Eton, Tel Halif, and Tell Beit Mirsim, as well as Kh. er-Rai in the western Shephelah). Settlement was transformed in the Iron Age IIA, with four of the villages turning into fortified towns or cities – three of them (Tel ‘Eton, Tel Halif, and Beth-Shemesh) apparently already in the 10th century BCE, whereas the exact timing (within the Iron Age IIA) of the changes in the fourth (Tell Beit Mirsim) cannot be ascertained. In addition, the region was gradually filled with new settlements, established in the course of the Iron Age IIA, e.g., Lachish, Tel Zayit, Tel Azeka, Kh. el-Qom, and Tel Burna, some at least in its early part (Faust 2020a, with references).⁹

Philistia. Here the pattern is the opposite of that of the Shephelah. While in the late Iron Age I Philistia boasted the largest sites in the Southern Levant, i.e., the mega-cities of Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron with relatively dense hinterlands, this all but changed in the Iron Age IIA (for detailed discussion and references, see Faust 2013a; 2015b; 2020a). Most of the small and mid-sized sites, like Tel Zippor, Tel Haror, Qubur el-Wallaydah, Nahal Patish, Umm al-Baqar, the so-called *Haserim*, and others, were abandoned altogether in the first decades of the Iron Age IIA, while most of the larger sites also changed significantly at the time. Some mid-sized sites like Tel Batash and probably also Tell el-Hesi were transformed, and the excavators (or those who analyzed the finds) suggest that the changes there indicate that they were incorporated within a different entity. As for the central sites of Philistia, Ekron declined dramatically in size to only some 20%

9. The site of Kh. Qeiyafa represents the first attempt to enter the Shephelah, one that probably failed (see Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018; Garfinkel, Kreimerman, and Zilberg 2016; see also Faust 2020a). It is possible that Kh. er-Rai belongs to this stage (Garfinkel et al. 2019a).

of its previous area and Ashkelon shrank as well. The situation in Ashdod, the smallest of the large sites, is not clear, but it is possible that it grew slightly. The only mega-site exhibiting continuity is Gath. We will see below that the settlement decline in Philistia occurred in tandem with additional changes that took place in this region, all indicating a decrease in the political importance of the Philistines in the early Iron Age IIA, a shift in their economic orientation, and changes in their boundary maintenance strategies.

The Sharon. This is an ecologically fringe area that was not usually densely settled. Interestingly, there is a surprising increase in settlement during the Iron Age IIA, and mainly in its early part. This increase is most noticeable in the basin of the Yarkon River, where settlement spread from Jaffa and Tel Michal on the Mediterranean coast, through Tel Qasile and Tel Gerisa, to Aphek on the river's springs. Iron Age IIA settlement in the region significantly exceeds that of the Iron Age I, and is also much denser than that of the Iron Age IIB (usually regarded as the Iron Age's settlement peak), when most sites lay desolate (Faust 2007b; 2018b, with references). Since the area was marginal and marshy, the cause of its prosperity was likely access to the sea, and the significance of the Yarkon basin is most telling, since as we will see below it directs us toward the possible causes of settlement prosperity. Changes, moreover, are evident not only in the number of sites but also in their form, expressed for example in the situation in Tel Qasile, which as we shall see below is also instructive on the agent of change.

The Beersheba-Arad valleys. Settlement in the area was transformed in the Iron Age IIA (Herzog 1994; Finkelstein 1995). The largest and most central site, Tel Masos II, was destroyed, and so was the adjacent settlement system, including, for example, Tel Esdar III. Other sites, however, were erected in the Iron Age IIA, such as the village at Arad, or were significantly modified, for example Beersheba (although its transformation into a fortified city occurred later in the Iron Age IIA).

The Negev highlands. There is a sharp increase in settlement at this time, and the area that was practically empty for a millennium is now filled with settlements, including about sixty “casemate-ringed enclosures” i.e., the famous “Negev fortresses” (Meshel 1994: 54), as well as remains of hundreds of other sites, including a few villages, isolated structures, and more (e.g., Finkelstein 1984; Meshel 1994; Faust 2006b; Haiman 2012). The phenomenon started in the early part of the Iron Age IIA and lasted into its later part. The sites exhibit clear connections with the

north, expressed for example in pottery (northern pottery comprises about 60% of the finds) and architecture (four-room houses, or what are more accurately described as longitudinal four-space houses, are found in many sites),¹⁰ but also with the copper production centers in the Aravah (discussed in the following), as some of the Negbite pottery that comprises 40% of the finds there (see more below) includes copper slags (Martin and Finkelstein 2013).¹¹

Edom/the Aravah. While copper production at Feinan and Timna was initiated at the very beginning of the Iron Age and was probably carried out by the local population of the region (most likely the Edomites), the situation was transformed in the 10th century BCE. New, massive construction (including fortifications) is evident at this time in both regions (Sapir-Hen and Ben-Yosef 2014; Ben-Yosef, Langgut, and Sapir-Hen 2017; Levy, Ben-Yosef, and Najjar 2018), with evidence for contact with the north being exemplified by the fortress, the longitudinal four-space (four-room) monumental building, and northern pottery in Kh. en-Nahash at Feinan (Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014: 989, model 2) and by many finds at Timna, including fruits and bones of Mediterranean fish (Sapir-Hen and Ben-Yosef 2014). While copper production showed a gradual increase, the changes in the 10th century BCE are not a culmination of a process but a transformation that is in line with other changes that took place at the time.

Central Transjordan. As a result of the less intensive coverage resulting from the lower numbers of planned and especially salvage excavations, the information from Transjordan is very partial. Still, the overall pattern is similar. Thus, a wave of abandonment is identified at Moab at the time, e.g., at Kh. al-Mudayna al-‘Aliya, Kh. al-Mudayna al-Mu‘arradja, Ara’ir, Abu al-Haraqa, Lahun, Balu’a, Medeineh-Smakie, the early phase at WT-13 at Wadi ath-Thamad, and others (Routledge 2004: 93, table 5.1, 106–108; Homès-Fredericq 2000: 194; Daviau 2017: 39; Steiner 2017: 173; Routledge et al. 2014). These should be dated to the end of the Iron Age I, or to some point in the 10th century BCE but not toward its end (see also Routledge et al. 2014: 103–105, contra Finkelstein and Lipschits 2011). As noted by Routledge et al. (2014: 104), the evidence for the abandonment can be seen as “the seeds of a new historical narrative in which small-scale communities are abandoned in

10. This house type will be briefly discussed below.

11. The early phase at ‘En Hazeva, prior to the establishment of the first larger fort, appears to date from the 10th century BCE, and it likely served as a way station on the route between the copper production center at Feinan in the northern Aravah (to be discussed presently) and the Negev sites.

the first half of the 10th century BCE, perhaps due to the formation of regional and inter-regional systems of politics and exchange.”¹² It appears that settlement revived only later in the Iron Age II, probably in connection with the rise of the Moabite kingdom of Mesha (for which, see for example Routledge 2004).

Ammon too experienced a decline at this time. The detailed review of Tyson (2014) indicates that many Iron Age I sites, like Tall Safut, Tall al-'Umayri, and Sahab, did not reveal Iron Age IIA remains, and he (Tyson 2014: 26) 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” (see also Herr and Najjar 2008: 319; Herr 2012: 218–219). When evidence from this era is found, the finds are sparse (the most notable exception is apparently the Amman citadel, which was partly fortified at this time). Thus, Iron Age I settlement declined at the beginning of the Iron Age II, and the fortified center of Amman controlled a relatively sparsely settled region (Tyson 2014: 27).

The evidence was recently summarized by Porter (2019: 328): “Current evidence suggests that most Iron Age I settlement of western Jordan dissipated during the mid-tenth century.”

Northern Transjordan. Apparently, the Gilead was somewhat different. Although excavations are limited, it seems that the region did experience some development at the time. Tell er-Rumeith (Ramot Gilead) – the major excavated (and published) site from these eras in the region – was settled for the first time at some point in the second half of the 10th century BCE, and a fort was erected at this time (Barako 2015b: 189–191; see also Barako 2015a: 8). Tall Zira'a, a mere village in the Iron Age I, was expanded and surrounded by a wall, and administrative structures were apparently built there (Vieweger and Haser 2007: 159). At Tell al-Husn it seems that fortifications were built in the early part of the Iron Age II, and the central site of Irbid appears to exhibit continuity from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II (Herr and Najjar 2008: 319; Herr 2012: 219; Leonard 1987). The limited evidence suggests that the region's history in the Iron Age IIA differed from that of at least large parts of central Transjordan, but the evidence is too limited for us to reach definitive conclusions.

The northern valleys and adjacent parts of the Lower Galilee. Although the northern valleys exhibit more continuity than most other regions, changes are

12. They also compare it to the situation in Cisjordan (Routledge et al. 2014: 104), but suggest that given the sparse evidence from Transjordan the connection with state formation is less self-evident.

abundant, some of them anything but gradual. Thus, while in the valleys some rural sites like Tel Qiri and probably also Tel Hadar continued to exist, some new villages, including Nir David (Tel Amal) and probably also Tel Qadesh, were established at this time, in contrast to other regions (for the rural sector, see discussion in Faust 2015a). Additionally, while a few cities continued to exist without obvious major changes, as was perhaps the case at Tel Rehov (Mazar 2008), many urban centers were entirely or partially destroyed and their subsequent rebuilding was in a different manner, for example Megiddo (Ussishkin 2017: 263–266, and see below), Jokneam (Ben-Tor 1993: 808), and to a large extent also Beth-Shean (e.g., Mazar 2006: 34–35; 2009a: 27–28, and see below). Moreover, other cities, mainly in the fringes of the valleys, were devastated and not rebuilt at all (or hardly rebuilt), for example Kinrot (Münger, Zangenberg, and Pakkala 2011), Tel Rekhesh (Onozuka and Kuwabara 2018), and perhaps also Tel Dover (Golani and Wolff 2018).¹³ Clearly, drastic transformations accompanied the Iron Age I–II transition in the northern valleys too. Sheila Gyllenberg (2019: 358), who carried out a detailed study of the northern regions from the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Iron Age, recently summarized that “by far the lowest degree of continuity (16%) was in the transition from IR IB to early IR IIA, since so many of the sites showed change (either growth or reduction/abandonment).”

The Galilee and the Hulah Valley. During the Iron Age I the hilly Galilee exhibits many rural sites, most of them abandoned around the transition to the Iron Age II, for example at Karmiel, Kh. Avot, Har Harashim, Sasa, and Har Adir, as well as ‘Ein el-Hilu farther south, although this was perhaps part of a different settlement phenomenon (Faust 2015a: 252–253 with references; see also Covello-Paran 2008: 1712; Katz 2020). Some villages in the lower parts of the Galilee were not only abandoned but also destroyed during the transition to the Iron Age II, for example Tell el-Wawiyat and Tel ‘En Zippori (Meyers 1998; Dessel 1999). Qiryat Shmona was also abandoned at this time (Covello-Paran 2012). The abandonment of so many highland villages and the destruction (and subsequent abandonment) of the “lower” villages (i.e., those located in highland valleys) was accompanied by the erection of new centers in the forms of towns and cities (and a fort), for example at Hazor, Tel Qarnei Hittin, Tel Mador, Kh. Abu Mudawer (a fort), and others (Ben-Tor 2016; Gal 1992; Faust 2015a with references; see also Feig 2014;

13. The lower city, which was partially excavated, was not rebuilt. The situation in the upper city, which was not excavated, is not clear (but even if it continued to exist, a major change is evident).

Dessel 1999). Finally, the Iron Age I city that existed at Tel Abel Beth Maacha was destroyed, and the Iron Age II city seems to have been built along different lines and incorporated many public buildings (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018: 152).¹⁴

All in all, it is quite clear that most regions experienced significant changes during the Iron Age I–II transition, which were anything but gradual.

2.4. Settlement Forms: Cities Without Temples

Within the scope of this article I will refer only briefly to one important change that took place at this time. While in earlier epochs temples, i.e., buildings erected for cultic purposes, were extremely common (e.g., Mazar 1992; Faust 2019 with references; Greener 2019), they are all but absent in large parts of the country in the Iron Age IIA. This change is important for understanding the extent of the Iron Age II polity and some of these cases will be briefly outlined in the following.

Megiddo. For millennia, there was a sequence of temples, one on top of the other, in Megiddo’s cultic quarter. This tradition, however, ceased with the destruction of Megiddo VIA in the early 10th century BCE. This millennia-long cultic tradition came to an end and no temple stood in what was formerly Megiddo’s sacred precinct (Otto 1980: 106; Halpern 2000: 559).

Beth-Shean. In Mazar’s interpretation (e.g., Mazar 2006: 34–35; 2009a: 27–28), although this is not accepted by all, the earlier temples ceased to exist in the Iron Age IIA and the function of this part of the mound changed.

Tel Qasile. Although the cultic compound, with its succession of temples, grew and developed in the course of Strata XII–X of the Iron Age I, after the massive destruction of Stratum X in the early 10th century BCE the temples were not rebuilt and there is only scant evidence for some ephemeral re-use of the area (for the sparse remains, see Mazar 1980: 50–53; 2009b: 327).

Hazor. While the Late Bronze Age city boasted a number of temples, no temples were unearthed in the small Iron Age II city that was built in the 10th century BCE.

14. While in themselves the changes at this site are in line with the general picture presented in this article, the nature of the changes (an Iron Age I city destroyed and rebuilt along different lines) seems similar to the pattern observed in the northern valleys. Historically speaking, the Hulah Valley is part of the Galilee, and this is why it is discussed in this section (and Hazor and Qiryat Shmona do fit into the Galilee pattern), but we must remember that in geographic terms this sub-region belongs to the northern valleys, and so the similarity should perhaps not come as a surprise.

Even more striking is the fact that the area of one of the Canaanite ceremonial, cultic complexes (labeled a “ceremonial palace” by Amnon Ben-Tor and a temple by Sharon Zuckerman; see also Ben-Tor 2016: 93–104), located within the smaller Iron Age city, was left as an unbuilt empty area; as Sandhaus (2013: 111) wrote, “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.”

This was a major transformation, and it is important to stress that not only did it take place at the same time as so many other changes, but it also directs us toward the only society we know of that did not have temples in every settlement – the Israelite society (Faust 2010; 2019; cf. Haran 1985). While in the highlands there were few temples even before the transition (note the cessation of the use of the Shechem temple earlier in the Iron Age I; cf. Stager 1999), this tradition now expanded to new regions including the Sharon and the northern valleys, indicating that the Israelites were responsible for the destruction and transformation of Megiddo VIA, Tel Qasile X, and Beth Shean S2, as well as the building of Hazor X.

2.5. Changes in Ceramic Traditions

The transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II also involved some drastic changes in pottery traditions, including:

Enlarged ceramic repertoire. In the various hilly parts of the country the Iron Age IIA ceramic repertoire was much richer than that of the Iron Age I (e.g., Aharoni 1982: 239; Finkelstein 1988: 274; Zimhoni 1997: 170; Franken 2005: 76). While this is a well-known phenomenon, its social aspects have received little attention. However, it is obvious that a wider repertoire could have served the purpose of social differentiation both between groups and within them, for example along class lines. The amplification of the repertoire at the beginning of the Iron Age II likely reflected the creation of new social groups and divisions within the society, and perhaps also the incorporation of additional groups.

Growing uniformity. While the Iron Age I boasted regional differences in pottery traditions, these vanished or were at least significantly reduced by the beginning of the Iron II, when we witness the disappearance of many local production traditions and the beginning of more uniform production techniques (although mass production started only during the 8th century BCE; Zimhoni 1997: 179). In the words of Aharoni (1982: 239), “regional differences gradually disappeared.” There was in effect a standardization and homogenization of pottery forms (see

also Finkelstein 1988: 274; Barkai 1992: 325; Dever 1997: 229; Franken 2005: 76; Kletter, Ziffer, and Zwickel 2007: 94), which Aharoni (1982: 239) referred to as an “industrial development.” While the social importance of this trait has not been widely discussed, it is clear that such a change is not merely economic but also relates to other aspects of society, including world-views and ideology (already Dever 1997: 229–230; see also Franken and London 1995: 221). The standardization of pottery and the “silencing” of local traditions created a more uniform material culture which seems to have strengthened the homogeneity of the society and may even have served as a vehicle through which messages (including messages of difference) became normative and were spread, diffused, and eventually embedded (cf. Sinopoli 1991: 121; Faust 2002). In this way the social order becomes “natural” (also Braithwaite 1982: 86, 87; David et al. 1988, see also below).

Finkelstein (1988: 274) summarized the above changes:

“... the strictly local nature of the ceramic manufacture [in the Iron I; AF] led to the great variety of subtypes within each category... 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” (see also Franken 2005: 76).¹⁵

Disappearance of important, symbolically loaded forms. As part of the disappearance of regional variation, and although the repertoire as a whole became much more varied, some pottery types simply disappeared. The collared rim jar (CRJ), for example, which dominated the assemblage of so many Iron Age I sites in the highlands (Finkelstein 1988: 275–285; Esse 1991; 1992 with references) simply disappeared during the Iron Age IIA in Cisjordan (Finkelstein 1988: 280–281; see also the discussion in Finkelstein 1995: 127–137). While this is not the place for a detailed discussion of the reasons behind the ubiquity of the CRJ during the Iron Age I, it is clear that it was an important component of the period’s material culture and conveyed various messages, probably pertaining to kinship and the prosperity of the family (Faust 2006a: 191–205; see also Esse 1991; 1992).

15. At the time, Finkelstein (1988: 274) explained the changes in the following words: “Organization into a state spelled the end of regional isolation.” A similar explanation was proposed, for example, by Barkay (1992: 325), who referred to the various new innovations as reflecting “the spirit of the age – a uniform and centralized system of government...” While Finkelstein has clearly revised his views since, not only is the pattern itself still in need of explanation, but also, as we will see below, these early suggestions seem very insightful.

Its disappearance most likely symbolized the decline in the importance of large kinship units and in the significance of kinship ties due to the growing social complexity that accompanied the emergence of the monarchy (e.g., Reviv 1993: 49–52; Faust 2012: 255–266 for discussion with references; see also Faust 2006a: 203). The suggested persistence of the CRJ (or its derivatives) in Transjordan (e.g., Herr 2001) is most revealing. Since the processes of social complexity were slower and weaker there, it is likely that family and kinship retained their importance somewhat longer (Faust 2006a: 191–205). It is also possible that the meaning of this symbol gradually changed in Transjordan.

The disappearance in the region of Samaria of markings on pottery, which were quite common in the Iron Age I (Cohen 2008), might also be connected to changes in kinship relations. Both changes are probably also related to the changes in settlement patterns in the highlands and the abandonment of many rural sites that have been discussed above. The same is true for the nearby region of Philistia, where the manufacture of the traditional Aegean-inspired pottery (Fig. 4a) came to an end (Dothan 1982: 296; Ben-Shlomo 2005: 185; 2006: 22–24; Uziel 2007: 167–168). This was apparently a result of a change in Philistine boundary maintenance strategy. Instead of exploiting their “foreignness” (real or imagined) and transmitting it, the Philistines now broadcast integration, especially regarding the Phoenician Mediterranean economy, whose significance grew at the time (Faust 2015b with references). This can also be seen in the adoption of new forms or styles in this region, to be discussed in the following.

New forms and styles, divorced from earlier traditions. I will exemplify this phenomenon with reference to (1) the Ashdod Ware, (2) slip and burnish, and (3) the Negbite pottery.

(1) Whereas the above-mentioned cessation of the production of the Aegean-inspired pottery of the Iron Age I is a manifestation of the Philistines’ integration within the local economy (expressed by the elimination of the style that was used to broadcast difference), this integration is even clearer when we examine the new type of pottery that was adopted in Philistia at the time – Ashdod Ware (Fig. 4b). Dothan and Freedman (1967: 130–132), who first identified this group, noted the similarity between it and Cypro-Phoenician pottery (now commonly referred to as “Black on Red”; Fig. 4c), but added that “there are differences significant enough to warrant giving the category a special name ‘Ashdod ware.’” Ben-Shlomo (2005: 185) defined this class of pottery in the following words: “Ashdod Ware pottery is characterized by red slip, horizontal wheel or vertical hand burnish and

black and white decoration. The forms are chiefly large kraters or closed vessels.” As far as the decoration is concerned, the Ashdod Ware presents a complete break from the Aegean-inspired tradition that originated in the Mycenaean IIIC (with many developments and outside influences). As Ben-Shlomo (2010: 174) wrote, the decoration is “lacking any Aegean-Style motifs” (cf. Dothan 1982: 218; Uziel 2007: 169).

Regardless of the exact source of influence (which is not necessarily the Black on Red pottery, which could be later in date),¹⁶ the Ashdod Ware is related to the Phoenician and Cypriot sphere of influence or style of decoration¹⁷ and is divorced from the Iron Age I Aegean-inspired Philistine decoration (Fig. 4a; see Faust 2015b for extensive discussion). This major change is evident not only in the style of decoration but also in the form of the vessels that received the new decoration, which are now mostly small containers rather than bowls (Faust 2015b and many references).

(2) An additional stylistic change taking place at the time is the widespread appearance of slip and burnish on certain types of vessels (Mazar 1985; 1998; Holladay 1990; 1993; Faust 2002), mainly those used for food consumption, whereas vessels used for food preparation and storage remained in their “natural” form. The sudden jump in popularity of this treatment can be seen in various sites for which statistics are available (following Mazar 1998: 375), for example at Tel Qasile (where slipped pottery increased from 7.9% in Stratum XII of the mid-Iron Age I to 30.8% in Stratum IX of the Iron Age IIA), Ashdod (increase from no slip at all during Strata XII–XI of the Iron Age I to 35% during the Iron Age IIA), Tel Batash (increase from 7.8% during Iron Age I to 48.5% in the Iron Age IIA), Gezer (increase from 2.7% in Stratum XII of the first half of the Iron Age I to 35.2% in Stratum VIII of the early Iron Age II), and Beersheba (increase from 20% in Stratum IX of the late Iron Age I to 37% in Stratum VIII of the early

16. Note that the Ashdod Ware is early; see for example Kang and Garfinkel 2009.

17. Thus according to Dothan and Freedman (1967: 130; see also Ben-Shlomo 2006: 23, 69; Schreiber 2003: 13): “(T)he style, the decoration, and the finish of these vessels... bear a resemblance to Cypro-Phoenician ware,” adding (p. 132) that “(A)mong the decorated pottery found, most vessels seem akin to Cypro-Phoenician and black-on-red ware, but all appear to have been made locally.” Kempinski (1983: 77) simply wrote that the Ashdod Ware is “a local variant of the ‘Black on Red’ ware.” Kang and Garfinkel (2009: 156) suggested that this was a reaction to developments in the Phoenician world, adding (p. 156): “Ashdod Ware decoration is probably a localized reaction of Philistine culture to much wider developments in pottery style toward the end of the Iron I.”

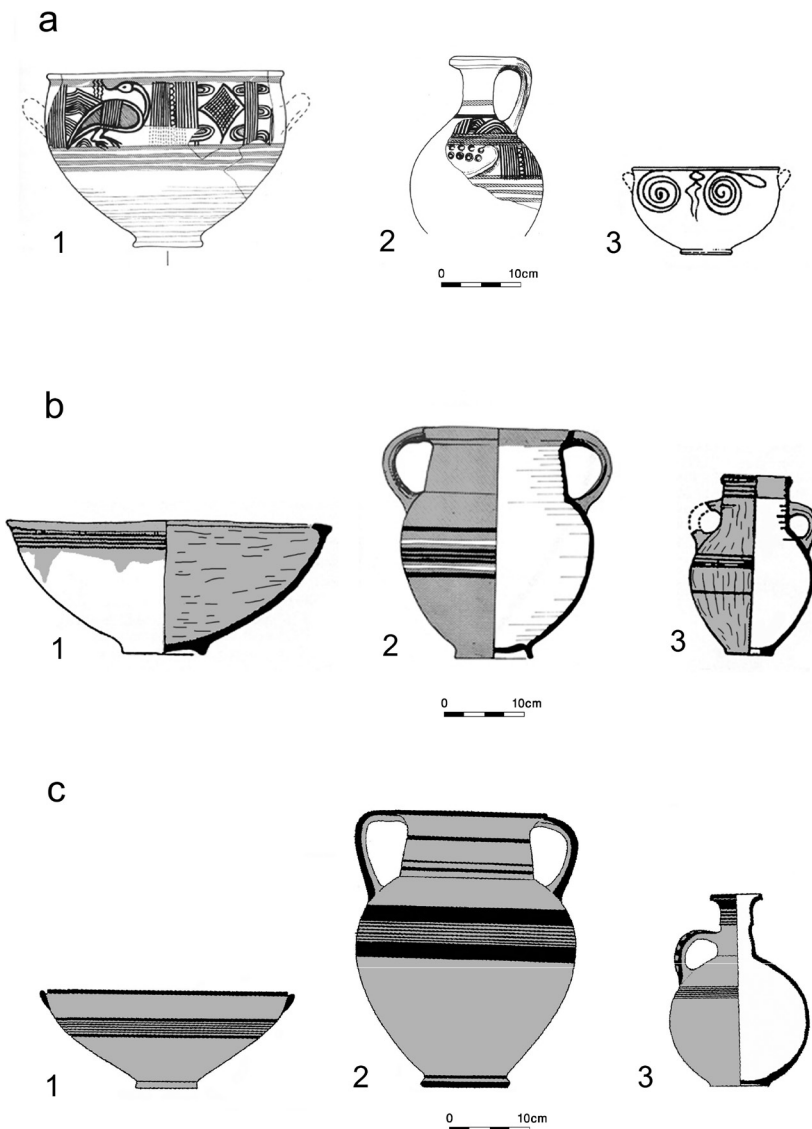


Fig. 4. Plate showing a sample of (a) Bichrome pottery, (b) Ashdod Ware and (c) Black on Red pottery, revealing the major difference between the Bichrome style of decoration and both the Ashdod Ware and the Black on Red, as well as the great similarity in decorative style between the latter two. Note that that whereas the Bichrome decoration is applied mainly to open vessels, the Phoenician style (Ashdod Ware and Black on Red) is far more common on small, closed vessels. a1: Krater from Ashdod (after Dothan and Porath 1993: Fig. 27:1); a2: Beer-jug from Ashdod XII (after Dothan and Porath 1993: Fig. 32:2); a3: Bowl from Tel Qasile XI (after Dothan 1982: Fig. 2:6); b1: Bowl from Gath (Tell es-Safi) 4 (after Ben-Shlomo et al. 2004: Fig. 1:1); b2: Krater from Ashdod 8 (after Dothan and Porath 1982: Fig. 14:14); b3: Amphora from Tel ‘Amal IV (after Levy and Edelstein 1972: Fig. 11:6); c1: BoR I bowl (after Schreiber 2003: Fig. 3:2); c2: BoR I amphora (after Schreiber 2003: Fig. 3:17); c3: BoR I jug (after Schreiber 2003: Fig. 3:18).

Iron Age IIA). Elsewhere it has been suggested that this had to do with social and ideological changes (Faust 2002). In ancient Israel, as in many other societies, food preparation was regarded as women's work and was conducted by them in the private part of the dwelling, while public food consumption was regarded as men's business (e.g., Meyers 1988: 145–146; Bird 1991: 106; 1992: 954; Bloch-Smith and Alpert Nakhai 1999: 76; cf. Gen 18:1–10; 1 Sam 8:13; Lev 26:26). It has been suggested that the formation of the monarchy in the Iron Age IIA also deepened gender inequalities (as would be expected for complex, or “state,” societies; Reiter 1975: 273; Rohrlich 1980; Haviland 1999: 324), which were symbolized by a more elaborate treatment of vessels used for “masculine” activities. It is also possible that, while vessels symbolic of women's activities remained within the realm of “nature” (earthenware), the slip and burnish transformed the vessels that symbolized masculine activities and brought them into the realm of “culture” (cf. Ortner 1974; Eriksen 2015: 164–165). Regardless of the exact explanation, the relatively sudden rise in the use of slip and burnish is another change that took place at the very beginning of the Iron Age II.

(3) A third, “new” Iron Age IIA ceramic style or phenomenon is the mass use of Negbite pottery in the Negev highlands. The term “Negbite Ware” refers to handmade, coarse pottery that became very popular in the Negev highlands in the Iron Age IIA. According to Meshel (2002: 283):

“The 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. The term ‘Negbite’ pottery was assign to it due to its distinctive regional distribution in the Negev, south of the Beer-Sheva valley.”

While this description is still generally valid, I should add that recent analysis has showed that some of the vessels were apparently produced in the Aravah sites (Martin and Finkelstein 2013). It is clear that such handmade pottery is not a new invention, and somewhat similar vessels are known in earlier epochs and continue after the Iron Age (e.g., Haiman and Goren 1992: 143–145; Meshel 2002: 286; Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004: 140–141). But while its popularity in other epochs was very limited, it surged in the Iron Age IIA, reaching some 40% of the pottery in the Negev highland sites (as noted, the rest of the pottery there was composed of “northern” forms, i.e., pottery typical of the northern part of

the country). Whatever the cause for the en-masse adoption of this pottery, it is interesting to note that it broadcast a completely different message from that of the northern forms (i.e., growing complexity, as discussed above), and this was clearly not an accident. The adoption of the Negbite Ware in the Negev highland sites “corresponds” (and contrasts) with the changes in the northern pottery. If the latter indeed point to social complexity, it is likely that the Negbite Ware attempt to transmit the opposite. One way or the other, the en-masse adoption of this handmade pottery is another drastic change taking place in the Iron Age IIA and also corresponding with the settlement wave in the same region discussed above.

2.6. Additional Material Changes

Notably, the changes in ceramic styles were accompanied by other material changes. While space limitations rule out extensive discussion of these changes, suffice it here to point to a few of them:

Pork consumption. Interestingly, the disappearance of the Aegean-inspired pottery in Philistia was accompanied by a significant decrease in the consumption of pork in this region (Gath is, again, an exception). Although mapping Iron Age I pork consumption produced clear and sharp boundaries, i.e., extremely high consumption by the Philistines versus almost total avoidance by all the immediate neighbors (Fig. 5), this changed in the Iron Age II, and in most sites the Philistines consumed smaller amounts of pork (e.g., Hesse and Wapnish 1997; Faust 2015b; 2018a; Fig. 6). This happened, as we have seen, at the time when settlement in the region was transformed and declined and when “local” (Phoenician?) pottery was adopted to replace the “foreign” ware, and must therefore be connected with the changes in boundary maintenance there. That other changes, like the adoption of Canaanite figurines and the local script (and more), took place at the same time seems to strengthen this interpretation (see also Faust 2015b with references). Indeed, while Israelites continued to avoid pork, some Canaanites in the north gradually increased their pork consumption in the Iron Age II, indicating that pork ceased to be a defining feature (as it clearly was in the Iron Age I; Faust 2018a with references) and that the change was significant (Fig. 7).

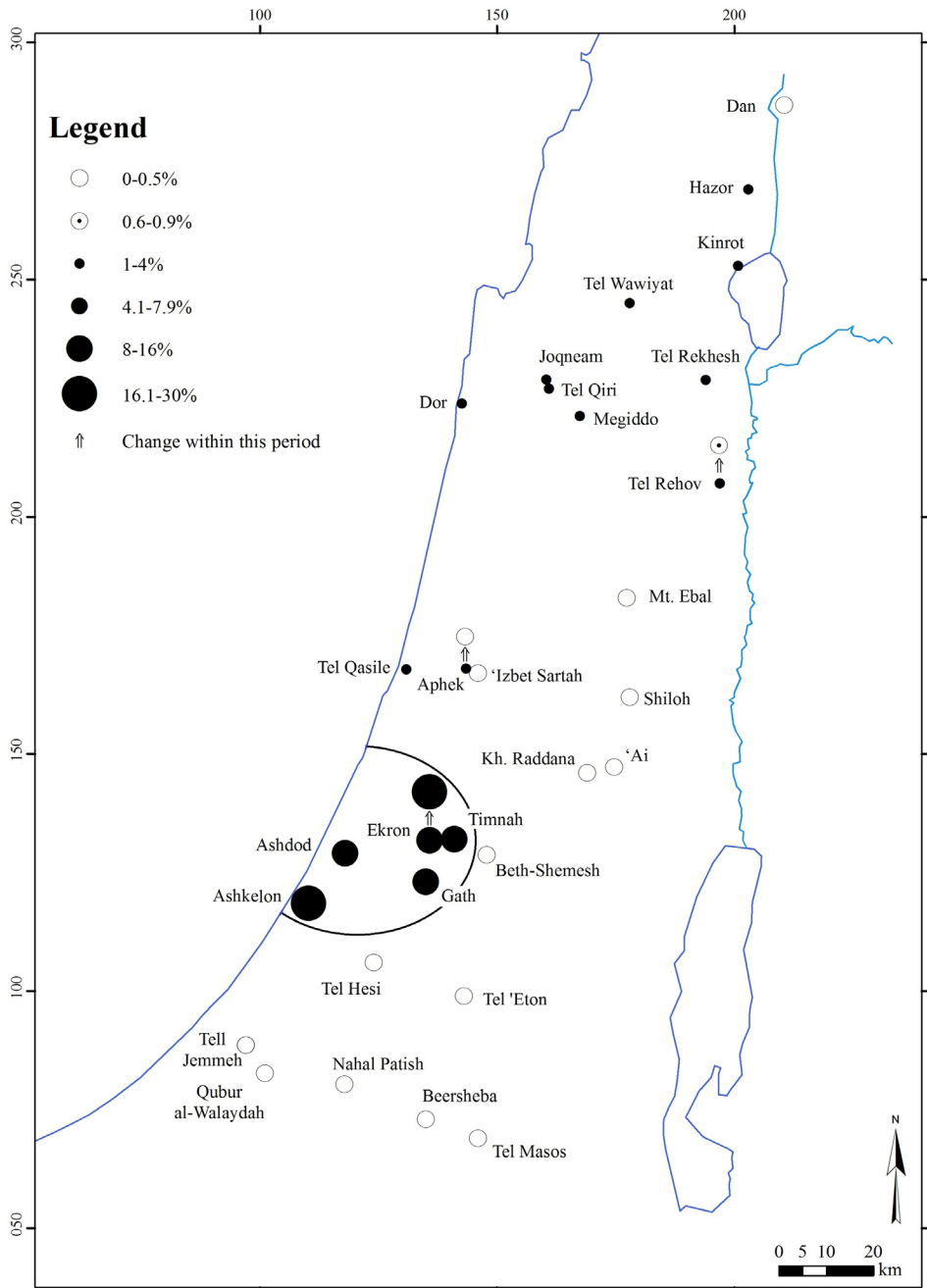


Fig. 5. Iron Age I pork consumption throughout the country. Note the contrast between the Philistine sites and their immediate neighbors. That consumption is low even in the far north indicates that high levels of pork consumption are associated in this era only with the Philistines (see Faust 2018a).

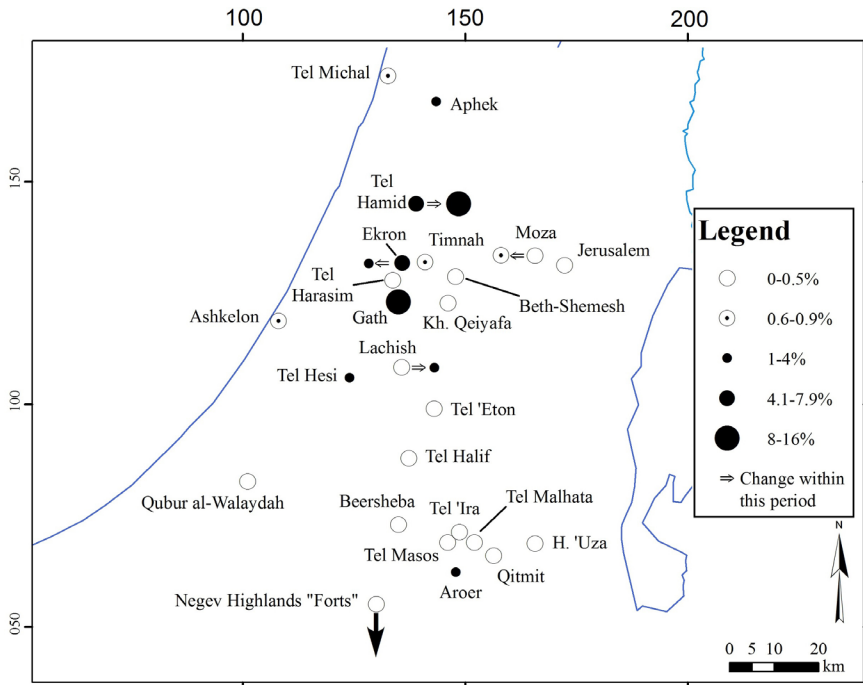


Fig. 6. Iron Age II pork consumption in the south. Note the changes in comparison with the Iron Age I (Fig. 4) and the lack of clear boundaries.

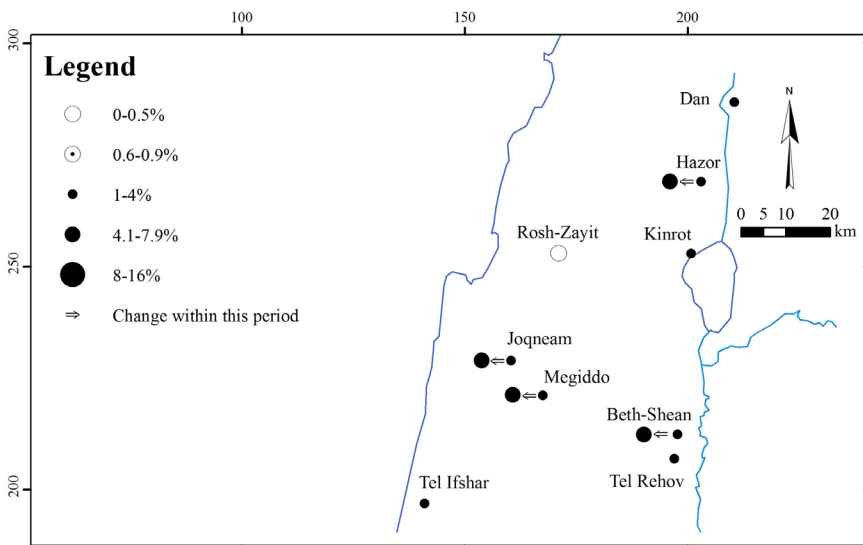


Fig. 7. Iron Age II pork consumption in the north. Note the changes in comparison with the Iron Age I (Fig. 4), and the rise in pork consumption in many sites, apparently resulting from high levels of consumption no longer being associated with the Philistines (cf. Faust 2018a).

The architecture of power, or the use of formal longitudinal four-space houses. The commonly used term “four-room house” is a generic name; the basic definition refers to a long house with a number of long spaces or areas in the front and a broad space or area at the back. Since many of these spaces are subdivided, however, it might be better to discuss the longitudinal four-space (henceforth LFS) house as a generic term for the house and its subtypes (see also Faust 2020b).¹⁸ Whether or not other peoples occasionally used them, these houses were in extensive use in Israelite sites (e.g., Shiloh 1970; 1973; Netzer 1992; Holladay 1997; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003; 2014). Notably, until the Iron Age I–II transition the plan of the LFS house was not uniform, and we are mainly talking of long houses that seem to conform with this type only very broadly (Fig. 8). Even houses that are similar in design still deviate in many important ways, and we cannot yet talk of a formal plan of the LFS house.¹⁹

In the early Iron Age IIA, however, two important changes took place. The first is that we now see many houses built in the formal LFS plan (and many even in the classical “four-space” plan rather than the “three-space” subtype or another variation). In addition, these “formally” designed houses, which are often large and nicely built, are now found over a much larger area, including the Shephelah, the Sharon, the northern valleys, the Negev highlands, and the Aravah. The following are a few examples:

Tel ‘Eton: In the 10th century BCE a new residency in the form of a classical LFS house was built on top of the mound (Faust and Sapir 2018; Faust et al. 2017; Fig. 9).

The Negev Highlands: Alongside the famous Negev “fortresses” or casemate structures, quite a few LFS houses, many of which were very nicely built, were erected (e.g., Haiman 2012; Fig. 10).

18. One can refer to longitudinal three-space houses, etc., when discussing the subtypes. It should be stressed that while in many instances some of the spaces are divided by monoliths, this is not always the case, and many houses do not have monoliths at all (whereas monoliths exist in many houses that do not belong to this type). Hence, while the use of monoliths is common, this is not a necessity and the use of monoliths is not part of the definition of the house (see also Faust and Bunimovitz 2003; 2014).

19. None of the building excavated at Iron Age I Kh. Raddana, ‘Ai, ‘Isbet Sartah, Giloh, Tel Masos, Tall ‘Umayri, etc., can be labeled a classical four-room, or longitudinal four-space, house, and despite the similarities all differ in some substantial details (e.g., the location of the entrance, or other details). Building J at Tel Qasile X is apparently an exception to this rule, and it is possible that this is the case also with Building 225 (cf., Mazar 2009b; note that, contrary to Mazar’s assessment, these buildings are rare at the site).

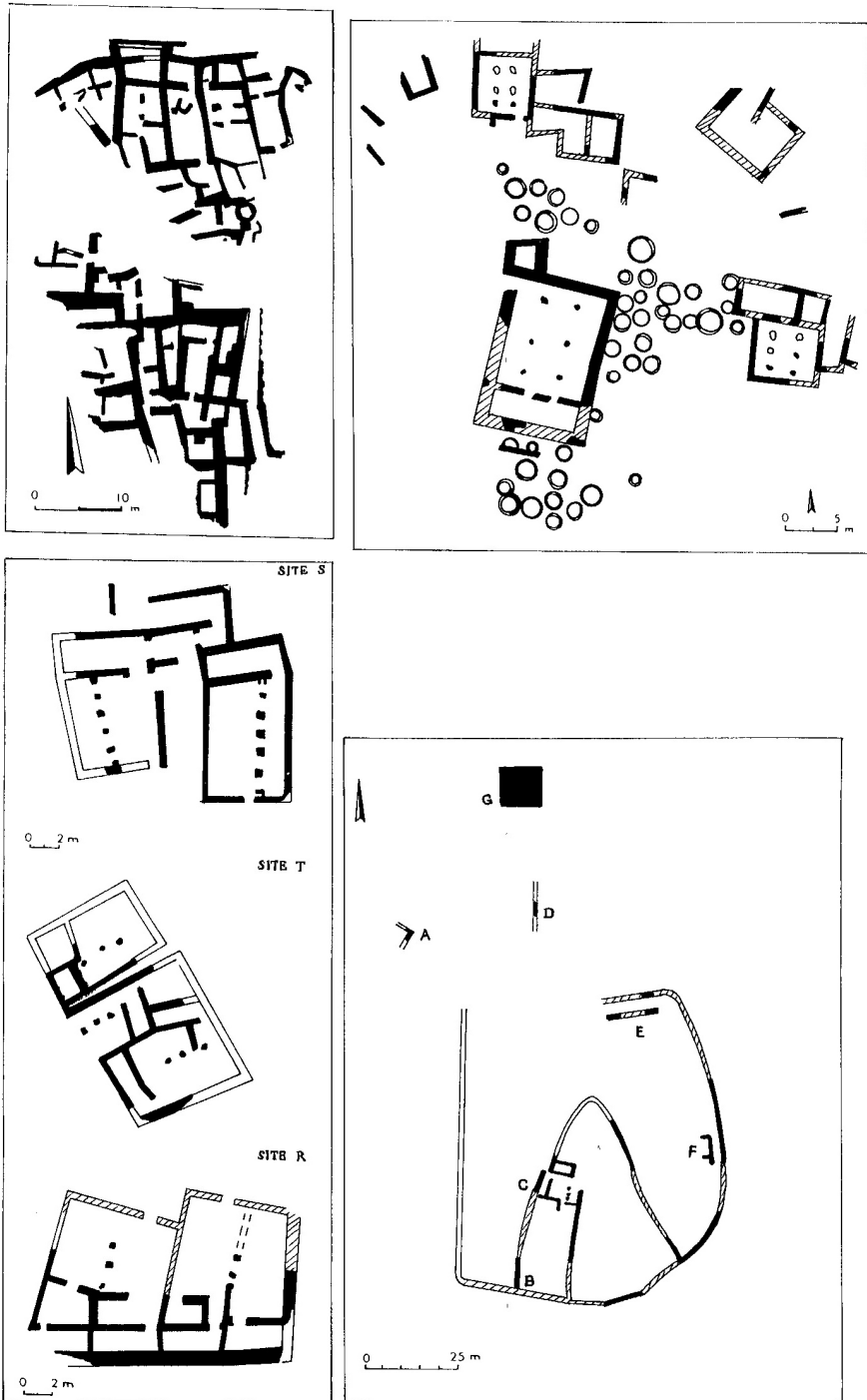


Fig. 8. Iron Age I “proto-LFS” houses. (A) ‘Ai, redrawn after Finkelstein 1988: Fig. 85; (B) ‘Izbet Sartah, redrawn after Finkelstein 1988: Fig. 21; (C) Kh. Raddana, redrawn after King and Stager 2001: 10; (D) Giloh, redrawn after Mazar 1994: Fig. 4).

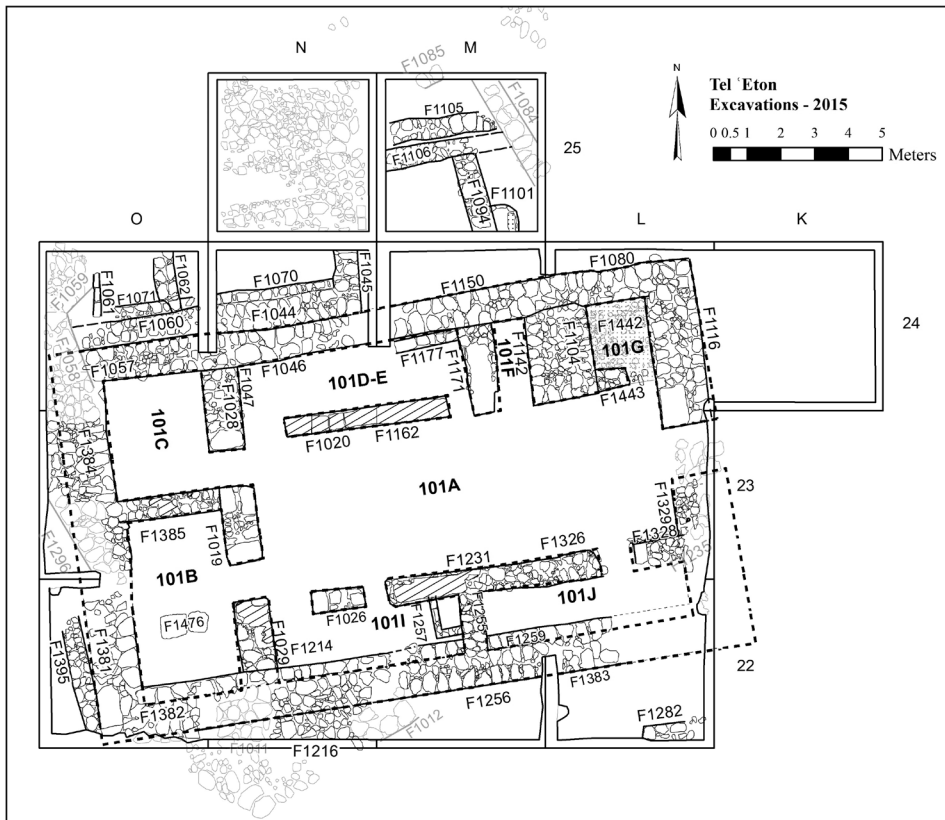


Fig. 9. The 10th-century BCE LFS house at Tel 'Eton (building 101, also known as the governor's residency).

Feinan: Surprisingly, several LFS houses were identified at Kh. en-Nahas; the largest one, also called “the monumental building,” was constructed in the early 10th century BCE (Levy et al. 2014: 204–205, see also pp. 231–232).

Tel Mevorakh: In the Iron Age IIA phase at the site, located not far from Dor in the Sharon, a large, well-built LFS house was erected (Stern 1978: 46–48).

Megiddo: It appears that Structure 1A is the earliest classical LFS house uncovered at Megiddo. It is dated to the first city of the Iron Age II, designated Stratum VA by some (e.g., Kempinski 1989: 121, Fig. 40:15, 126) and Stratum VA–VIB by the majority of scholars (e.g., Ussishkin 2017: 321–324).²⁰

This shows that the form was rather abruptly selected at the very beginning of

20. These are a few examples. One should also consider the suggestion that various public buildings, like Megiddo Palace 6000 (dated to the early Iron Age IIA), also follow the LFS plan (Lehmann and Killebrew 2010).



Fig. 10. Photograph (from the back) of the LFS house near the casemate structure at Atar Haroa (photograph by Avraham Faust).

the Iron Age II to transmit a certain message – an architecture of power; hence its formal plan, nice execution (in these instances), and very wide geographical distribution. It is likely that this selection led to the later widespread adoption of the LFS house in Israelite society in both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah throughout the Iron Age.

3. Processes and Events

Before reconstructing the process through which the highland polity was formed and its subsequent expansion, I would like to present a few general observations.

The transformations described above, which took place during the Iron Age I–II transition (and are probably also responsible for this periodization), can be divided into three different types:

1. **Processes of growing social complexity.** Such processes, expressed, for example, in the growing popularity of slip and burnish, took place throughout the region at large, even if at different paces. It must be stressed that, although they were relatively rapid, these were nevertheless processes lasting several generations.

2. **Expedited political processes.** These processes are easier to distinguish geographically and are expressed, for example, in the abandonment of the highland rural sites in the late Iron Age I.
3. **Historical events,** expressed, for example, in the destruction of sites.

The different types of change are, of course, not unrelated; on the contrary, they were all connected to a degree, and each informed the others (see the brief discussion below).

3.1. Chronological Implications

The processes were relatively rapid, and within less than a century both the landscape and the material world of the region were significantly transformed. While some of the changes relate to growing social complexity and others were a result of rapid political changes (regardless of the exact causes of the changes or how they unfolded, to be reconstructed below), both are fully manifested (even if at different paces) within the early Iron Age II and cannot be delayed to the Iron Age IIB (or even Iron Age IIC), as suggested by some scholars. These changes started in the late Iron Age I and took place mainly in the early Iron Age IIA.

3.2. Geographical Implications

The changes covered the entire region, from the Galilee to the Negev highlands and the Aravah, and from the Sharon and Philistia to at least some parts of Transjordan, showing how expansive were the processes of social change and how the events unfolded.

A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of such a brief paper, but the evidence indicates that while growing Iron Age social complexity (#1, above) had many nuclei, a major process of transformation started in the highlands and then expanded. That the focus of many of the changes discussed above was in the highlands can be seen in the process of rural abandonment that was initiated there before other regions (see Figs. 2–3 above), as well as by the chain of events that accompanied the transformations in other regions (#3, above), like the widespread destructions (and abandonments), the extensive distribution of the LFS houses that evolved in the highlands and were now used (in a formal plan) in other regions, the sudden abandonment of temples (a feature of Israelite society) in the lowland regions of the northern valleys and the Yarkon basin, and more (see also Faust 2007b for additional connections with the highlands).

4. The Emergence of the Highland Polity and its Expansion: A Reconstruction

Although each and every trait or phenomenon deserves its own article (and quite a few have already received it), in the following I will offer merely a brief and somewhat simplistic summary of the development of the highland polity.

4.1. The Emergence of the Monarchy

While there were other foci of social complexity, for example in Iron Age I Philistia, Tyre, Aram, Transjordan, and (to some extent) even the northern valleys, the processes discussed above started in the highlands, and the abandonment of the villages there seems to be its first indication (Figs. 2–3 above; see also Fig. 11 below).²¹

The abandonment of the highland villages toward the end of the Iron Age I was apparently a result of external threat, most likely posed by the major political power of the region in the 11th century BCE, i.e., the Philistines (see also Master, this volume). The highland population now concentrated, in growing numbers, in more easily defensible locations, and this was the catalyst for the transformations there, leading to greater demographic concentrations and enabling the development of leadership and further social changes (Faust 2003; 2015a). The greater population density and the need to confront “the enemy” enabled charismatic leaders to amass power and gather support, and this is how the initial leadership, which in retrospect was the early monarchy, eventually emerged (cf. Flannery 1999 with many references).²² These charismatic leaders took advantage of the political circumstances, succeeded in creating a power base, and managed to

21. Note that the boundaries are very schematic, and in their delineation I also took into account information that is not discussed in this article (like the overall reality in the Iron Age II, i.e., what was included within the boundaries of Israel and Judah at a later stage, and sometimes also the biblical testimony (which has been discussed elsewhere, and see also Faust and Farber forthcoming). It must be stressed, however, that this pertains only to the delineation of the schematic boundaries (i.e., the boundaries of the areas in which the different processes took place), and not to the processes themselves.

22. It should be stressed that in most cases these “charismatic” leaders were not “despotic rulers,” as often imagined, and actually ruled with a sort of “consent” of (most of) the population (cf., Blanton 2016; Blanton and Fargher 2008, and many references, and see studies “collective action”). This is clearly in line with the prevailing ethos of simplicity and egalitarianism that seems to have been dominant in ancient Israel (see Faust forthcoming a and many references), and might even explain it.

extend their power (directly and indirectly) into other sub-regions, initially within the highlands and later also elsewhere.

4.2. The Late Iron Age I and the Beginning of the Iron Age II: A Note on the Geopolitical Context

The time discussed here witnessed the intersection of several long-term processes that are indirectly related. One of the known characteristics of the Iron Age I in the Levant (and beyond it) is the severe decline – though not cessation – of international trade and connections from some point in the 12th century BCE; in this respect the period is regarded as a nadir after the flourishing trade of the Late Bronze Age (for the traditional view, see various papers in Ward and Joukowsky 1992 and in Gitin, Mazar, and Stern 1998; for more recent studies, see for example Gilboa 2005; Gilboa, Waiman-Barak, and Sharon 2015; Routledge 2015). The second characteristic of the Iron Age I is the withdrawal of all major powers from the Southern Levant, after which the local cities and groups were largely left to fend for themselves (e.g., various papers in Ward and Joukowsky 1992 and in Gitin, Mazar, and Stern 1998; Killebrew 2014).

The decline in international trade, however, was relatively short-lived. Trade already increased in the course of the 11th century BCE, and much more so in the Iron Age II, as expressed by the enhanced Phoenician Mediterranean trade, copper production (and subsequently trade) in the Arava sites, and the growth of the Arabian trade (e.g., Jasmin 2006; Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014; Gilboa, Waiman-Barak, and Sharon 2015; see also Faust 2006b). By contrast, the other characteristic of the Iron Age I – the lack of large empires meddling intensively in the region – continued until the late 10th century BCE.²³

The processes described in the previous section (#4.1, and see also 4.3 below), therefore, took place under unique geopolitical circumstances. On the one hand, the regions adjacent to the highlands became gradually more prosperous, and the potential looting (by raids), taxation (by conquest) and tribute (by “hegemonic” control and alliances) was exceptionally attractive to the emerging highland polity. On the other hand, unlike most epochs in the history of the Land of Israel, there was no imperial center (like Egypt in the Late Bronze Age, Assyria in the late

23. The absence of foreign powers has often been used to explain the unique rise of a local kingdom in the highlands of ancient Israel (a view with which I concur), whereas others have suggested that a period of general decline is unlikely to have given rise to a large polity in such a marginal area (an argument which I find unconvincing); see, for example, Miller 1997.

8th and much of the 7th century BCE, and others) that claimed control over this potential wealth.

This is the background for the expansion of the newly emerged highland polity.

4.3. The Expansion of the Highland Polity

After consolidating its power over the highlands, the new rulers (or the young monarchy) raided other regions, already creating waves of changes in various lowland regions at the very beginning of the Iron Age IIA (first half of the 10th century BCE).²⁴ These were expressed in settlement patterns and even forms, such as the abandonment of many villages in some regions, the destruction of many cities and their rebuilding following a different plan, and more.

Thus, it appears that the Shephelah, which was sparsely settled in the Iron Age I, was gradually colonized by the highland kingdom (Fig. 11). Initially, the Canaanite settlements that existed in the region, e.g., Beth-Shemesh, Tel ‘Eton, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Tel Halif (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011; Faust and Katz 2011) aligned themselves with the new polity. This was most likely a voluntary association, as the massive transformations in settlement size and planning did not follow major destructions, and hence it seems that the Canaanites in the Shephelah formed alliances with the emerging local power. This opened up the region for the highlanders and enabled its colonization and later the establishing of new sites, all connected with this new polity, at places like Lachish, Tel Zayit, Tel Azeka, Tel Burna, and many others (Faust 2013b; 2020a).

The other side of the process of the expansion into the Shephelah is of course the political weakening of the Philistines and the drastic change in the Philistines’ boundary maintenance strategy that probably resulted from it (Faust 2015b; 2020a; see also Ehrlich 1996). We have no reason to suppose that the highland polity took control of any major Philistine center (as expressed, for example by the continued lack of features like LFS houses in Philistine sites, the continued use of temples, and more), although it probably became stronger at the Philistines’ expense. Accordingly, many settlements in Philistia were abandoned and others declined, while a few settlements (probably inhabited mainly by Canaanites)

24. One might compare this with the Mfecane/Difaqane, which impacted large swaths of land in southeastern Africa in the early 19th century CE. Regardless of the exact causes that initiated the process, just like here it apparently started earlier and only peaked at the time of the new kingdom’s expansion (e.g., Hamilton 1995; Mitchell 2002; Wright 2010 and many references).



Fig. 11. Schematic map summarizing the expansion of the highland polity (the background map with the location of sites was prepared by Charles Wilson). The map, which should be used in conjunction with the text and cannot stand on its own, shows the original core of the Israelite groups (light yellow), additional areas that were or became Israelite (i.e., areas whose population apparently adopted this identity) at the time (light orange), as well as the areas that were taken over via various mechanisms (conquests, alliances/agreements, etc.) (light green) and at least two areas that were perhaps officially subordinated to the highland polity, even if they retained autonomy (darker green). Notably, the schematic distinction between light green and dark green is somewhat simplistic, since we are discussing a continuum and the highland polity most likely exerted various modes of control over the territories that were under its hegemony, resulting in a sort of a mosaic of control (and leaving some areas under a very loose form of control).

nearer to the border were now probably under direct Israelite control (e.g., Tel Batash, Tell el-Hesi, and others).

The growing control of the new polity was extended also to the Negev, and was expressed in the cessation of the Iron Age I settlement system in the Beersheba-Arad valleys and by the construction of other sites in this region (e.g., Herzog 1994), and especially by the establishment of the casemate settlements (“fortresses”), accompanied by LFS houses, in the Negev highlands (e.g., Haiman 2012 with references; see also Halpern 2001: 353–355, 465; Faust 2006b).²⁵ The impact of the expanding polity even extended as far as the Aravah (as expressed in the suddenly increasing evidence of contacts with the north at this time, the presence of LFS houses, and more), although this was most likely in the form of alliances, i.e., indirect control.

Further north along the coast, the new polity took control over parts of the Sharon (Fig. 11) and apparently invested in the Yarkon basin, which was important as the new polity’s corridor to the sea, enabling some contact (import, for example) with the expanding Phoenician realm (Faust 2007b). The identity of those responsible for the investment in the region can be gleaned not only from the fact that the Yarkon basin was of importance only to a small area in the region of Benjamin, Jerusalem, and Gezer (hence pointing us toward Jerusalem as the only likely candidate),²⁶ but also from the fact that the temple at Tel Qasile was not rebuilt after the conquest and the new city (Stratum IX) did not have a temple, conforming with what seems to have been the Israelite practice.

Expansion was identified also farther north, in the northern valleys and the Galilee (Fig. 11). The identity of those responsible for the changes is expressed here too by the settlement history and the dates of the destructions of towns and abandonment of villages, by the cessation of the use of temples in Canaanite centers like Megiddo and Beth-Shean, bringing long-lived traditions to an abrupt end (see already Halpern 2000: 559; 2001: 474), by the sudden building of formally planned LFS houses, and more. The evidence suggests that the valleys were taken

25. Control over the region meant control over some of the major trade routes, through which part of the Arabian trade and copper from the Aravah mines reached the Mediterranean (e.g., Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014; see also Jasmin 2006; Faust 2006b). Interestingly, it is possible that the copper trade, which was seemingly controlled (directly or indirectly) by the highland kingdom, was directed during part of the period through the northern valleys to ports in Phoenicia (Mazar and Kourou 2019: 385–386).

26. Due to space limitations I was unable to discuss the situation in Jerusalem; see, however, Mazar 2010; Faust 2004; 2017 with references.

over by the new polity (partially via direct conquests, partially via alliances),²⁷ whereas the situation in the hilly Galilee was different: the inhabitants of the Galilee shared many features, related to both daily practices, social organization and perhaps even origins, with the Israelites, and under the circumstances most likely adopted the Israelite identity quite easily (and a few might have been regarded as affiliates even earlier), to the benefit of both sides (this issue will be developed in Faust forthcoming b; Faust and Farber forthcoming).

Some evidence for expansion can be seen in Transjordan as well. Although the data from this region is much sparser, it appears that information from the Gilead is in line with its incorporation within the new kingdom (e.g., Barako 2015a). It is likely that the Gileadites went through a similar process to the one in the hilly Galilee (see also Levin 2007). The evidence from Ammon and Moab also shows the impact of the new polity in the form of the destruction and desertion of many sites (whether the region was under “formal” control or, more likely, not; cf. the changes in Philistia).

Beyond the changes in settlement patterns, summarized briefly above, the expansion of the new polity was also expressed by the enlargement of the ceramic repertoire, reflecting increasing social complexity, and its (relatively) growing uniformity, indicative of the territorial expansion of social conventions and the breaking down of regional traditions (it must, however, be stressed that these changes started earlier and took place in additional regions, and that rather than being merely a result of the emergence of the new polity, they to a large extent also precipitated it and enabled it). The same can be gleaned from the disappearance of some of the older ceramic traditions. The CRJs disappeared because as kinship-related objects they did not fit into the new social landscape and were therefore neglected. The disappearance of the Philistine pottery is indicative of the group’s change of boundary maintenance strategy resulting from the economic and political transformations in this region, also expressed in changes in settlement patterns and material culture (pork consumption, figurines, etc.). The adoption of the Phoenician-inspired Ashdod Ware in this region is the other side of the same coin, indicating the military and politically weakening of this group, the lowering of ethnic boundaries, and a new economic and social reorientation toward the sea and the Mediterranean maritime trade. The adoption of the Negbite pottery

27. While conquest does not necessarily lead to total destruction, it is possible that the lack of destruction at sites like Rehov (see above) hints at the site’s incorporation into the new polity via alliance.

among some disenfranchised groups in the south might indicate that they rejected the new world that forced them to live in these remote settlements.

All in all, the data seems to suggest that a new polity, centered on the highlands, was formed during the Iron Age I–II transition and that it had an impact on large parts of the country, from the Arava to the Upper Galilee, and apparently also on parts of the central coastal plain and Transjordan, where it successfully competed with other emerging centers of power (Fig. 11).²⁸ Whether this impact was a result of conquest, political affiliation, or cultural contact is a different question, but the above shows that the changes that resulted from this crisis were significant.

Notably, while some phenomena can be explained in more than one way, there is only one explanation that can account for all the changes – the parallel rise of social complexity and emergence of a polity in the central highlands and its subsequent expansion, leading to additional changes even beyond its core.²⁹

5. Concluding Remarks: The Highland Polity, the Anthropology of States and Empires, and the Question of the “United Monarchy”

Acknowledging the troubled nature of the transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II is the first step in understanding the processes that led to the emergence of the monarchy in ancient Israel (and of other Levantine polities), as well as the causes of its emergence, its activities once in place, and the regions affected. Furthermore, if we identify the crisis, we can significantly narrow down the time when these changes took place, and we will not need to arbitrarily “cut” a long trajectory of evolving complexity in order to identify the time when “statehood” emerged.

The finds indicate that the crisis started in the later Iron Age I and climaxed in the early Iron Age IIA. According to the modified conventional chronology,

28. In theory, one could suggest that there were several highland polities that emerged at the same time and exerted influence over other regions simultaneously. I find this to be highly unlikely due, for example, to the occurrence of LFS houses in new regions in both the north and the south.

29. The issue will be discussed at length elsewhere, but events in which rapid changes, rising social complexity, and the formation of new polities led to settlement changes and even wide-scale abandonment over larger areas, even beyond the immediate vicinity of the political unit discussed, are well-known; see for example Flannery 1999, as well as the above-mentioned Mfecane/Difaqane (regardless of how one reconstructs the entire process), for which see Hamilton 1995; Mitchell 2002: 369–379; Wright 2010 with references.

therefore, we are discussing a process beginning in the second half of the 11th century BCE (in the highlands) and covering the first half or three quarters of the 10th century BCE.³⁰

Geographically speaking, it must be stressed that even if one does not accept the brief reconstruction offered above, we are discussing a broad phenomenon and not a northern or southern kingdom with limited impact. The changes, after all, incorporate the entire highland region and well beyond it, impacting regions from the Negev and the Arava in the south to the Upper Galilee in the north, and from parts of the coastal plain in the west to large tracts of Transjordan in the east. The core of the new polity was clearly the highlands, where the changes took place in the late Iron Age I, and while not every region later affected by the emergence of the polity was necessarily incorporated within it (as noted above regarding the changes in Philistia and Moab, for example), many of the impacted regions were, at least temporarily, annexed by or otherwise affiliated with it. This affiliation was often a result not of conquest but of various forms of alliances and different modes of patron-client relations, by which various local rulers (temporarily?) submitted to the emerging polity.

Thus, the (re)building of new cities without temples is clearly not a coincidence; rather, it shows the large scope of the expanding polity and probably indicates direct control. The same can be gleaned from some additional phenomena, like the surprising prosperity along the Yarkon basin, which can be explained only by the importance of this area for Jerusalem (Faust 2007b). The sudden construction of new, “formal” LFS houses in large swaths of the country is probably also indicative of the expansion of the new polity, although such structures could also have been erected in areas only partially controlled by the polity through alliances but apparently exhibiting at least formal subordination.³¹

Thus, regardless of how one wishes to explain a particular find or pattern, the evidence indicates that a new polity emerged in the highlands during the Iron Age I–II transition, and that this polity expanded beyond the highlands and had an impact over large parts of the Land of Israel, collaborating with some groups

30. Given the radiocarbon dates from the destruction levels of Megiddo VIA and Tel Qasile X, as well as those for the construction of Structure 101 at Tel ‘Eton and more, it seems that Mazar’s Modified Conventional Chronology is amply supported.

31. Note the case of Dor and Tel Mevorakh, where the construction of a formal LFS building at the latter perhaps symbolized control over the former. This would account for the pattern reported by Gilboa, Sharon, and Bloch-Smith 2015, and I think it better explains the overall archaeological and historical information available. The issue will be discussed elsewhere.

and competing with other groups or polities that emerged, and sometimes subduing them.

While this article is not the place to discuss the relevant anthropological literature or the biblical texts, I would like to note that given the opportunistic nature of this expansion, most likely relying on the charisma of some rulers (mainly David, if we are to believe the biblical narrative) and the favorable circumstances in which no major power existed in the traditional centers of authority, it is not surprising that this new polity could not exert power over all these sub-regions for long and disintegrated after a generation or two. Such opportunistic short-lived polities that result from a charismatic leader taking advantage of favorable local circumstances are a well attested phenomenon (e.g., Flannery 1999 with references). Furthermore, such polities, even expanding ones, often emerge rather rapidly from simpler societies, and the emerging entities do not have all the characteristics expected from a “state” (like bureaucracy, or socioeconomic stratification).³² Hence, expanding polities, which according to practically all common definitions are in essence empires (below), often do not emerge *From* states but actually precede them! As noted by Barfield (2001: 33): “From 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.” Or, in other words, we witness “an empire before the state” (Morris 2018: 11–38).³³

Thus, while the word “empire” typically invokes an image of a very large, well-established, well-organized, bureaucratic, and long-lasting polity, like the Roman, British, and even Assyrian empires, this is often not the case, and most empires were short-lived and were rapidly created as a result of a unique combination of charismatic rulers and favorable circumstances (cf. Flannery 1999; Howe

32. This is indeed one of the criticisms leveled at the neo-evolutionist approaches. For the various critics, see for example Yoffee 2005; Pauketat 2007; Blanton and Fargher 2008; Routledge 2014 with references. The present case study, therefore, fits well into current understandings of the way polities are formed.

33. This is the main reason why I have preferred to avoid the term “state” in this context. While the term is legitimate and often helpful (as long as its limitations are remembered), it is an etic definition of a social phenomenon. In this case we have a kingdom that possibly does not meet all the criteria of a “state” (see also the lack of stratification in the highlands, and see Faust 2012: 259–261), and in order to avoid irrelevant and futile discussion of definitions (which can partly be solved when we remember that the definitions refer to ideal types), I prefer to use less “loaded” terms.

2002: 37; see also Faust and Farber forthcoming). Indeed, common definitions of an empire refer to a political body that expands, taking control of other areas and other groups. While definitions vary, what practically all empires have in common is their expansive nature, their composite character (i.e., inclusion of different ethnic groups), and the disparity of power that they create between the center of control and the conquered or controlled regions (e.g., Sinopoli 1994: 159, 160; Howe 2002: 15, 30). While these definitions are wide and apply to massive empires like the Roman and the British, they are also applicable to much smaller entities that expanded well beyond their core and exercised control over other groups, like the (indeed very modest) reconstruction presented above of the highland polity.

And how does this relate to the biblical kingdom of David and Solomon?³⁴ The depiction of this kingdom is often influenced by what are identified as later biblical layers and mainly by recent scholarly and popular imagination that have glorified it (cf., McKenzie 2000; Halpern 2001; van Seters 2009; Baden 2013; Blenkinsopp 2013). But even when the later additions and glorifications are stripped away, it appears that, contrary to some skeptical views, an expanding polity centered on the highlands did emerge at the very beginning of the Iron Age II. And while this polity was much smaller and less grand than its depiction in late layers of the biblical narrative and scholarly and popular imagination,³⁵ it nevertheless existed and impacted significant areas within the rather small region of the Southern Levant.³⁶

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies for sponsoring some of the research that resulted in this study. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference on “State Formation Processes in the 10th

34. For what is probably still the best large-scale integration of the archaeological evidence within the study of the textual evidence, see Halpern 2001; see also Halpern 2005.

35. Notably, the negative assessment of the historicity of the “united monarchy” is impacted not only by its glorification by the (exaggerated) later narratives, but is also often clouded by a simplistic, common-sense notion of what empire is (see above).

36. In line with the Pre-Deuteronomistic nature of large parts of the books of Samuel. For various discussions, see, for example, the papers in Edenburg and Pakkala 2013; for additional studies see also MaCarter 1980; 1984; McKenzie 2000; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; 2006; Halpern 2001; 2005; Hutton 2009; van Seters 2009; Schniedwind 2010; Baden 2013; Blenkinsopp 2013; Garsiel 2018; Galil 2020. The issue is discussed at length in Faust and Farber forthcoming.

Century BCE Levant,” and I thank the participants for their comments. William Schniedewind commented on an earlier version of the paper, and I am grateful for his comments. The responsibility for any error is, of course, mine alone.

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