The Study of the 10th Century BCE in the Early 21st Century CE: An Overview

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1. Introduction

Until some thirty years ago, the main contours of the biblical story about the kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon, or what came to be known as the "United Monarchy," was viewed as historical.

The Iron Age I (roughly the 12th–11th centuries BCE), which preceded the emergence of the monarchy, has generally been regarded as an era characterized by fairly simple societies occupying the highlands on both sides of the Jordan River. Toward the end of this era, according to the consensus that was largely based on the biblical narrative, there was a process by which society became more complex, peaking in the 10th century BCE when kingdoms, or states, emerged. Among these kingdoms was that of David and Solomon, also known as the "United Monarchy" (e.g., Kenyon 1960; Aharoni 1979; Mazar 1979; 1980).

In the 1970s and 1980s many scholars were profoundly influenced by the neo-evolutionary approaches that dominated the social sciences at the time (e.g., Service 1962; Fried 1967), and biblical scholars and archaeologists debated the nature of the process, when can we identify chiefdoms, and at the time of which biblical figures can we speak of early or mature states (e.g., Frick 1985; Gottwald 1979; Chaney 1986; Hauer 1986; Finkelstein 1989). This discussion,

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which peaked in the 1980s, was cut short in the 1990s, initially by the boom of the minimalist school in biblical studies and later as a result of the debate over Iron Age chronology.

The minimalists questioned the historical validity of the information incorporated in the Hebrew Bible in toto, challenging any reconstruction that was based on this source, which they claimed was written as literature many centuries after the events it purported to describe (e.g., Whitelam 1996; Davies 1992; Thompson 1999). While this school had a significant impact on biblical scholarship (despite attracting few adherents), it exerted little influence in archaeological circles, whose importance grew significantly at this time.

This was a result of their lack of familiarity with the archaeological data, which they viewed at the time as "mute," and was exacerbated by their treatment of the finds that contradicted their assertions, for example the Tel Dan stele and their suggestions that it does not refer to the "House of David" or that it was even forged (e.g., Davies 1994; Lemche and Thompson 1994) – claims that mainstream scholarship viewed as completely baseless and as resulting from refusal to accept the evidence (e.g., Rainey 1994; Lemaire 1998; Dever 2001: 29–30, 128–129). The challenge posed by the low chronology of Finkelstein (1995, 1996; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001) and the rise of the Tel Aviv School proved more substantial. Indeed, as we shall see, the debate that it generates persists to this day, and was naturally also seized upon by the minimalists, who until this time had largely ignored the material evidence, to support their skeptical approach.

As a result of these debates, however, the United Monarchy gradually became contested, and David and Solomon, to borrow the term of the late Gary Knopper (1997), "vanished" from the scholarly discourse (see also various papers in Handy 1997). If until then one could find articles dealing, for example, with David's army or the economy of Solomon's reign (e.g., Mazar 1986; Meyers 1983), since the late 1990s mere references to Solomon were very limited, without needing a lengthy justification as to why this figure should be viewed as historical in the first place. There were only a few detailed attempts to salvage the core of the narrative (e.g., Halpern 2001) or the historicity of Solomon's temple and palace (e.g., Garfinkel and Mumcuoglu 2013; 2016).

The caution that resulted from the debates was clearly a welcome development, and one of the outcomes of the exchange was the advance of Mazar's Modified Conventional Chronology (e.g., Mazar 2005; 2011). Still, the fierce and sometimes emotional exchange that evolved led to the creation of different approaches, and various scholars became committed to this or that "school." One could at times

feel that there were cases in which new data was judged not by their merit but by whether or not they fitted the theory. And if they were not easily accommodated, the data were sometimes bent to fit existing paradigms rather than to examine them. Consequently, different schools and scholars often repeated well-rehearsed views, sometimes using superior fire-power rather than arguments to overwhelm the audience.

The sophisticated methods of data collection and analysis that resulted from the debate significantly narrowed the chronological gap between the schools, leading most scholars to follow various versions of the traditional, or modified, chronology (e.g., Stager 2003; Mazar 2011; Katz and Faust 2014; Garfinkel et al. 2015; 2019; Dever 2017; Faust and Sapir 2018; Ortiz 2018; Master 2019), and even Finkelstein raised his chronology dramatically, agreeing that not only the Iron Age IIA, but perhaps even the late Iron Age IIA, started already in the 10th century BCE (e.g., Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2011: 51; Kleiman et al. 2019: 534–535). Given the heightened emotions and high stakes, these developments were insufficient to end the dispute, as the minor gap that remained between the schools was sufficient to justify different historical reconstructions; and so the debate goes on.

Given the emotional reactions, many preferred to leave the arena and others avoided joining the discussion in the first place. Hence, despite the great progress in research and the large amount of data acquired over the years, we witness a number of scholarly groups that to a large extent talk past each other, while many sit on the fence and avoid the 10th-century debate altogether. This has led to what seems like a stalemate, manifested by the lack of any attempts to create an arena for fruitful and constructive debate and to foster a deeper understanding of this transformative period.

2. The Conference

The conference "State Formation Processes in the 10th Century BCE Levant," conducted on April 7–11 2019, aimed to overcome this impasse by gathering a large number of scholars representing different views, approaches, and interests, who deal not only with ancient Israel, which is after all part of a much larger region, but with the entire Levant, in an attempt to review the processes that took place during the Iron Age I–II transition.

The papers presented aimed to create not a new consensus, but a new dialogue and a constructive discourse: a discourse that addresses the new data that has accumulated in the last twenty years and has drastically transformed our knowledge of

this era and that addresses the larger picture, one that is not limited to the United Monarchy, although this is clearly the elephant in the room. The discussion of the latter was therefore part of a larger discourse from both the geographical and the methodological perspectives, touching not only on the historical questions but also on methodological issues concerning the formation of the archaeological record on the one hand, and the nature of its interpretation on the other.

Indeed, the different papers read at the conference presented new data and new approaches and interpretations, which together with the wide geographical scope created a positive framework for fruitful discussion and debate (Figs. 1–4).

Fig. 1. Participants in the conference, from left to right: Steve Ortiz, Sam Wolff, James Hardin, Zvi Lederman, Silvia Schroer, Erez Ben-Yosef, Kyle Keimer, Bruce Routledge, Michael Hasel, Madeleine Mumcuoglu, Avraham Faust, Haya Katz, David Schloen, Ayelet Gilboa, Yosef Garfinkel, William (Bill) Dever, Zvi Greenhut, Amihai Mazar, Christopher Rollston, Assaf Yasur-Landau.

Fig. 2. Visit of the conference participants to Tel Beth-Shemesh.

Fig. 3. Visit of the conference participants to Khirbet Qeiyafa.

Fig. 4. Visit of the conference participants to Tel Lachish.

3. The Volume

This issue contains updated versions of most of the papers presented in the conference.

Avraham Faust's paper (The "United Monarchy" on the Ground: The Disruptive Character of the Iron Age I–II Transition and the Nature of Political Transformations) is a broad overview of the Iron Age I–II transition and processes leading to the formation of the monarchy, aiming to reconstruct the development of the highland polity. Faust takes issue with the common view 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 with the emergence of "states" (of which the so-called "United Monarchy" was one). Faust 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, he argues that the Iron Age I–II transition was troubled and was accompanied by drastic changes in many parameters, such as settlement patterns, settlement forms, and other material traits. The

paper incorporates these changes within a broad historical reconstruction of the processes that led to the emergence of the monarchy in Iron Age Israel and accompanied it, as well as the expansion of the new polity that was created.

Kyle Keimer (Evaluating the "United Monarchy" of Israel: Unity and Identity in Text and Archaeology) argues that many interpretations of the so-called "United Monarchy" of Saul, David, and Solomon are built upon false assumptions and problematic hermeneutics, not to mention the fact that they draw upon anachronistic terminology. This is significant because such issues impact how the history of the early Israelite monarchy is reconstructed, how archaeological materials are related to political organization, and how text and archaeology are integrated. Keimer suggests that what is needed is a framework for reading the text that is methodologically informed and which draws upon relevant theories. The article provides a brief overview of the use of the terms "United Monarchy" and "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" in modern scholarship before turning to recent attempts to theorize and model ancient monarchies, including the ways in which ancient kingdoms controlled territory and how leaders legitimated their power and expressed their authority in a manner that unified their constituencies. Subsequently, the paper re-evaluates the biblical portrayal of the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon, considering in particular the nature of early Israel's political and social unity and identity, before turning to the potential archaeological correlates of political power during the reigns of these kings.

William G. Dever's contribution (Solomon, Scripture, and Science: The Rise of the Judahite State in the 10th Century BCE) calls on archaeologists to acknowledge that should view themselves as historians and consequently develop the appropriate methodologies to use the material evidence – which is now the prime line of evidence – for historical reconstructions. Using the study of the Gezer gate as a case-study, Dever examines the emergence of the monarchy in the 10th century. After evaluating the various types of data, Dever concludes that, despite the biases of the various lines of evidence, the kingdom of David and Solomon in Judah in the 10th century BCE did exist.

Yosef Garfinkel's paper (The Tenth Century BCE in Judah: Archaeology and the Biblical Tradition) is a broad reconstruction of Judah in the 10th century BCE. Garfinkel discusses the regional project in the Judean Shephelah, which began in 2007 and investigated four sites: Khirbet Qeiyafa, Khirbet al-Ra'i, Socoh, and Lachish. The paper presents the evidence from the 10th century BCE in these sites, together with the relevant biblical traditions. The data is then analyzed according

to an urban geography model and reconstructs the gradual development and territorial expansion of the Kingdom of Judah in the Iron Age IIA.

Erez Ben-Yosef's paper (Rethinking Social Complexity of Early Iron Age Nomads) challenges some of the most basic assumptions underlying the discussion of Near Eastern archaeology at large, and the discussion of the United Monarchy in particular. Based on recent evidence from the Aravah Valley, Ben-Yosef disputes the prevailing assumption that Bedouin ethnography and inferences from ancient Near Eastern archives can adequately compensate for the archaeological lacuna in the study of biblical-era nomads. He argues that the evidence indicates that nomadic social organization at the turn of the 1st millennium BCE could have been far more complex than has ever been considered before. This paper discusses the implications of the now extended spectrum of possible interpretations of nomads for the archaeological discourse on early Iron Age state formation processes in the Southern Levant. Using the cases of ancient Edom and Moab, the paper demonstrates that common reconstructions of "emergence" and "collapse" are, in fact, oscillations in the archaeological visibility of nomadic societies, which do not necessarily correlate with an increase or decline in social complexity. Rather, it is more likely that the appearance and disappearance of stone-built remains reflect processes along the sedentary–nomadic continuum (in which "sedentary" does not equal more socially complex), as well as a response to varying economic and geopolitical needs. It is likewise argued that in current biblical archaeology, archaeology-based historical reconstructions of ancient Israel and the United Monarchy are inherently flawed and suffer from a bias in favor of interpretations of the more "critical" school, which gives an unbalanced weight to the sedentary (i.e., the archaeologically visible).

Zvi Greenhut's paper (Moẓa during the 10th–9th Centuries BCE: The Results of Excavation Seasons 1993, 2002, and 2003 and their Reflection in a Wider Judahite Context) focuses on the discoveries in Moẓa, an important center located in a fertile and well-watered valley to the west of Jerusalem. The paper presents the finds from the relevant strata, mostly those of the Iron Age, and embed them within the broader evidence from other sites in Benjamin and Judah in order to examine the role played by Moẓa within the emerging highland polity.

Daniel Master's paper (The Philistines in the Highlands: A View from Ashkelon) brings in a different perspective, that of the coastal Philistines. Given that the collapse of Bronze Age Mediterranean trade was a long-term process that took place through the 12th and 11th centuries, its effects were particularly acute for coastal cities such as Philistine Ashkelon. Master studies the response

to this crisis in Philistia by examining redactional strata in the Deuteronomistic History that might speak to the period of early Philistine activity in the highlands. Through the memories preserved in these texts and archaeological results from the late Iron Age I–early Iron Age IIA, he argues that the Philistines reacted to the loss of Mediterranean trade by conducting raids that devastated rural highland settlements.

The paper by Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff discusses the recent excavations at Tel Gezer, conducted under the auspices of the Tandy Institute for Archaeology. These excavations exposed a large area west of the Iron Age gate complex, popularly referred to as the "Solomonic Gate". The article discusses the early Iron Age levels and focuses on Strata 8 and 7, dated by ^{14}C and ceramic analyses to the 10th century BCE. Stratum 8, extensively discussed in the article, represents a unique period of Gezer's history when the city experienced a major shift in urban planning, as evidenced by a monumental administrative buildings and casemate fortifications that were associated with the Iron Age gate. This city, cautiously attributed by the authors to Solomon, was intensely destroyed, probably as a result of Sheshonq's campaign.

Amihai Mazar's article (The Beth Shean Valley and its Vicinity in the 10th century BCE) brings together results of archaeological explorations related to the 10th century BCE in the Beth Shean Valley, with emphasis on the excavations at Tel Beth Shean and Tel Reḥov. The paper evaluates the evidence in light of two transitions that occurred during this century: from Iron Age I to early Iron Age IIA and from early Iron Age IIA to late Iron Age IIA. These transitions and their dates are well documented by stratigraphic sequences, pottery development, and ^{14}C dates, the latter mainly at Tel Reḥov. The discussion focuses on Stratum VI at Tel Reḥov, since it is an exceptional case in which the early Iron Age IIA could be isolated and documented, showing continuity of urban life in that period with no actual crisis at the end of the Iron Age I. This is in contrast to the situation at many other sites such as Tel Beth Shean, Megiddo, Yoqne'am, and Tel Kinneret, where a crisis at the end of Iron Age I, followed by decline or occupation gaps and slow revival in the late 10th century, were observed. The article deals with various aspects of the material culture of this period and addresses questions relating to ethnic and geopolitical identity, as well as to the biblical narrative relating to an alleged United Monarchy and to the Shoshenq I list.

Gunnar Lehmann's contribution (The Emergence of Early Phoenicia) takes the discussion farther north. Lehmann too argues that the transition from the Iron Age I to Iron Age IIA during the 10th century BCE was a period of profound

political and socio-economic transformations in the Levant. Among these developments was the emergence of early Phoenicia. This was the time when Phoenicia emanated as an interface of international exchange connecting Mediterranean and continental economies of the Levant. This had a profound impact on the societies of the Southern Levant in general and ancient Israel in particular. According to Lehmann, Phoenician influence was not marginal for the history of ancient Israel but developed into an integral component of Israelite economic and political history.

Timothy Harrison's paper (The Iron Age I–II Transition in the Northern Levant: An Emerging Consensus?) expands the discussion of the Iron Age I–II transition to the northern Levant, largely on the basis of the new discoveries at Tell Tayinat (ancient Kunulua), capital of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Palastin/Walastin. Harrison notes that, despite more than a century of research, scholars have not been able to reach broad agreement about the chronological and cultural Iron Age sequence, and that the task has been complicated by methodological issues, in particular with the chronological implications of the rich art-historical record preserved in the citadels of the Syro-Anatolian royal cities that have been excavated. Tell Tayinat was the scene of large-scale excavations by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition in the 1930s, and the renewed investigations at the site have resulted in a tightly constructed stratigraphic and chronological cultural sequence, or "local history," for this period. This refined "Amuq Sequence" includes a number of culturally and historically significant transitions, including the transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II, ca. 900 BCE, and offers the prospect of forging a consensus regarding the cultural and chronological periodization of the broader Iron Age Northern Levant and Southeast Anatolia.

The final part of the issue, comprising four papers, focuses more closely on some aspects of finds. The paper of Hoo-Goo Kang and Yosef Garfinkel (The Fortifications of Areas CC and BC at Tel Lachish) summarizes the relevant finds unearthed by the Fourth Expedition to Tel Lachish (2014–2017). The new expedition revealed a series of fortifications in Area CC, in the center of the northern edge of the mound. In addition to the previously known city walls of Levels I–IV, a new city wall, built in Level V and dated to the late 10th and the first half of the 9th centuries BCE, was uncovered. This city wall changes our understanding of the nature of Lachish V and has important implications on our understanding of the process by which the Shephelah was colonized by the highland polity.

The paper by Zachary Thomas, Kyle H. Keimer, and Yosef Garfinkel (The Early Iron Age IIA Ceramic Assemblage from Khirbet al-Ra'i) presents the early 10th

century BCE pottery assemblage from the site of Khirbet al-Ra'i. This important assemblage came from a few rooms that were suddenly destroyed, and present a large number of complete profiles. This is the second largest pottery assemblage of this barely known phase in the region of Judah, after the assemblage of Khirbet Qeiyafa.

The paper by Madeleine Mumcuoglu and Yosef Garfinkel (Royal Architecture in the Iron Age Levant) reviews broad developments in elite architecture that took place during the Iron Age II (10th–6th centuries BCE), mostly associated with the local kings. The six prominent characteristics of this royal style are recessed doors and windows, rectangular roof beams, ashlar stone masonry, volute (proto-Aeolic) capitals, window balustrades, and decorated bases. The paper defines the phenomenon, summarizes the data, and evaluates its appearance and distribution in the Levant and the implications for the debate over the emergence of kingdom in the Iron Age II.

Silvia Schroer's paper (The Continuity of the Canaanite Glyptic Tradition into the Iron Age I–IIA) relates several recognizable developments in the iconography of the Early Iron Age to the discussion of the Iron Age I–II transition. Although iconography is not able to answer the question of whether state formation began in the 10th century BCE, it does indicate that during the 11th and beginning of the 10th centuries BCE the dominant Egyptian influence was in decline, and other traditions came to prominence: from the north, Syrian influences, and in some places sub-Mycenaean influences. Above all, however, the autochthonous Canaanite heritage experienced a revival, developing new themes and using new media.

4. Conclusion

This assemblage of papers presents on the one hand fresh data relating to the 10th century BCE and on the other hand analysis and discussions of archaeological, historical, and biblical data. We hope that the papers published in this issue, while not presenting a unified view on the questions at hand, will help to break the impasse, limit the damage of rhetoric, and will move research forward on the basis of solid evidence.

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