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INTRODUCTION: WHY A BOOK ON THE NORTHERN KINGDOM?

In the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., Israel ruled over the lion's share of the territory of the two Hebrew kingdoms (fig. 1), and its population accounted for three quarters of the people of Israel and Judah combined (Broshi and Finkelstein 1992). Israel was stronger than Judah both militarily and economically, and in the first half of the ninth century and in the first half of the eighth century—almost half the time the two kingdoms co-existed—Israel dominated the southern kingdom. Nonetheless, Israel has lingered in the shadow of Judah, both in the story told in the Hebrew Bible and in the attention paid to it by modern scholarship.

1. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

The history of ancient Israel in the Hebrew Bible was written by Judahite¹ authors in Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom and the hub of the Davidic dynasty. As such it transmits Judahite ideas regarding territory, kingship, temple, and cult. Moreover, even what some scholars consider as the early layers of the history of ancient Israel, such as the books of Samuel (e.g., McCarter 1994; Halpern 2001; Römer and de Pury 2000, 123–28; Hutton 2009), were written after the northern kingdom was vanquished by Assyria and its elite was deported. In the late seventh

1. In this book “Judahite” is used as an adjective for terms relating to the kingdom of Judah (also described here as the “southern kingdom”), e.g., Judahite pottery. “Judean” is used to refer to geographical regions, such as the Judean Desert. “Israel” generally refers to the northern kingdom, while “ancient Israel” refers to the Iron Age people—north and south combined. In “two Hebrew kingdoms” I ostensibly adhere to the ideology of later Judahite-Judean authors but at the same time acknowledge both the proximities and differences in their material culture and cognitive world (see more in Finkelstein 1999a).



Figure 1. Map of Israel and Judah in the eighth century B.C.E.

century, when the early layer in the Deuteronomistic History was compiled (Cross 1973, 274–88; Naʿaman 2002b; Römer 2007), the northern kingdom was already a remote, vague memory over a century old, and this in a period with no continuity of scribal activity. It is true that Israelite traditions are incorporated in the Hebrew Bible. I refer to blocks such as the Jacob cycle in Genesis (de Pury 1991), the exodus tradition (van der Toorn 1996, 287–315), what is known as the “Book of Saviors” in Judges (Richter 1966), positive traditions regarding King Saul in Samuel, the Elijah-Elisha prophetic stories in Kings, and the two northern prophets Hosea and Amos (for the impact of northern texts on the Hebrew Bible, see Schiedewind 2004; Fleming 2012). These traditions could have reached Judah orally or in a written form.

The original northern texts—or at least some of them—could have been written as early as the first half of the eighth century B.C.E. in the capital Samaria or in the temple of YHWH at Bethel, located on the northern border of Judah (also Fleming 2012, 314–21; for a later date of compilation at Bethel, see Knauf 2006; Davies 2007a, 2007b; for the archaeology of Bethel, see Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2009). Both written texts and oral traditions were probably brought to Judah by Israelite refugees after the fall of Israel in 720 B.C.E. (Schniedewind 2004; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006b); estimates of demographic growth in Judah from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB (ninth to late eighth/early seventh centuries B.C.E.) indicate that in late monarchic times Israelite groups made up a significant part of the population of the southern kingdom (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006b). The northern traditions were incorporated into the Judahite canon either because they supported the Judahite ideology or because of political needs in Judah to absorb the significant Israelite population in the kingdom. In the latter case the original Israelite traditions were subjected to Judahite needs and ideology, as in the case of the book of Samuel, which incorporated negative northern traditions about the founder of the Davidic dynasty but gave them a twist to clear David of all wrongdoing (McCarter 1980a; Halpern 2001). So even here the genuine, original voice of Israel is barely heard in the Hebrew Bible.

The political ideology of the Deuteronomistic History in the Bible depicts the reality after the fall of the northern kingdom. It is Judah-centric, arguing that all territories that once belonged to Israel must be ruled by a Davidic king, that all Hebrews must accept the rule of the Davidic dynasty, and that all Hebrews must worship the God of Israel at the temple in Jerusalem. The story of the northern kingdom is therefore mostly tele-

graphic and its tone negative;² while the individual Hebrews can all join the nation if they accept the centrality of the Jerusalem temple and dynasty, their kingdom and kings are viewed as illegitimate.

Only Jeroboam I and Ahab are given relatively large shares of text, but, needless to repeat, the tone of this text is negative. For example, Jeroboam I, the founder of the northern kingdom, is described as the original apostate, the individual whose sins doomed the north from the outset (Cross 1973, 274–88). The reign of other north Israelite kings is summarized in a few sentences. Only six verses are given to Omri, the founder of the most celebrated dynasty of the north, the king by whose name Israel is known in Assyrian records. Only one of these verses is informative, that is, nonformulative in nature. Seven verses are given to Jeroboam II, one of the most important kings in the history of the two Hebrew kingdoms, who ruled for approximately 40 years (788–747 B.C.E.) and conquered vast territories. Very little is told about the capital Samaria, and relatively little is known about the countryside towns and villages. This is so due to their distance from Jerusalem and the authors' lack of direct knowledge of the landscape. A good example of the latter is the Israelite territory in Transjordan. Only a few towns are mentioned in this area, the size of which is equal to the highlands territory of Judah, of which the Bible mentions the names of about fifty towns.

This situation is amplified by the fact that biblical, archaeological, and historical studies of ancient Israel have been dominated by the Judeo-Christian historical tradition, which has been shaped, in turn, by the Hebrew Bible, that is, the Judahite text. The Bible is what it is, and hence biblical scholarship basically deals with Judah and with the Judahite perspective of Israel, which was formulated a century after the collapse of the northern kingdom.

Archaeological research somewhat balances this picture. Iron Age Judah has been thoroughly studied. Jerusalem is one of the most excavated cities in the world, especially over the last fifty years, and almost all the major sites in its countryside have been excavated: Mizpah and Hebron in the highlands; Lachish and Beth-shemesh in the Shephelah; and Beer-sheba and Arad in the Beer-sheba Valley. Israel has not been deprived of

2. In the book of Chronicles, which was written much later than the books of Kings, probably not earlier than the third century B.C.E., and which represents Second Temple theology and political ideology, the history of the northern kingdom is nearly avoided all together.

investigation. Samaria, the capital, has been thoroughly excavated twice in the past, and all major countryside sites have also been explored. I refer to Bethel, Shechem, and Tell el-Far'ah (Tirzah) in the hill country, Gezer in the southwest, Dor on the coast, and Megiddo, Jezreel, Hazor, and Dan in the northern valleys. In addition, the countryside of the northern kingdom—in the highlands and lowlands alike—has been meticulously investigated in archaeological surveys that have enabled the drawing of settlement maps by period. It is field research, then, that enables one to write an archaeology-based, Judahite ideology-free history of Israel, and in the end also to reach a more balanced reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel in general and the two Hebrew kingdoms in particular.

This book tells the story of the northern kingdom mainly in its formative phases. The lead narrative is that of archaeology—results of excavations and surveys alike. Then the story of archaeology is combined with the little that we know from ancient Near Eastern texts and with those biblical texts that can be judged to provide genuine, nonpropagandistic information—even vague memories—of the northern kingdom.

Regarding biblical materials that do not come from northern circles—for instance, information provided by the books of Kings—the question, of course, is how the late-monarchic Judahite author(s) who lived in Jerusalem knew about events that took place centuries before their own time, some in locations far from Jerusalem. The answer is that the Judahite author(s) must have had access to a list of Israelite kings that specified the years of their reigns and some additional pieces of data about their origins and deaths. This list must have provided them with knowledge that enabled the correlation between the Israelite and Judahite monarchs. The information included in the short biblical verses is generally accurate, as it is supported by extrabiblical Assyrian texts. It should also be remembered that northern sources—if, indeed, put in writing in Samaria or Bethel in the early eighth century—were much closer in date to the formative phases in the history of Israel and Judah in the tenth century B.C.E. than the Judahite authors of late-monarchic and later times. Such northern authors were just over a century away from this formative phase, compared to three centuries for the early Judahite authors of the late seventh century B.C.E. An important source of information could have been Israelite refugees who settled in Judah and who could have provided the Judahite author(s) with written materials as well as oral traditions regarding different parts of the territory of the northern kingdom, on both sides of the Jordan River.

My intention in this book is not to give a full account of the material culture and history of the north in the Iron Age. My goal is to deal mainly with the geo-political situation in the southern Levant, territorial history of Israel and what is described in anthropological literature as “state formation,” that is, the development of territorial entities with bureaucratic apparatus and institutions. Special emphasis will be given to the impact of the environment on historical developments and to long-term processes that dictated the history of the north in the late second and early first millennium B.C.E.

The chronological scope of this book is from the Late Bronze II to the Iron IIB. In absolute chronology terms this is the period of time between circa 1350 and 700 B.C.E. However, the main discussion concentrates on a shorter period of time: the rise of territorial polity in the central highlands of Israel between circa 1000 and 850 B.C.E. The Late Bronze Age is discussed mainly as a model for which we obtain reasonably good archaeological and historical materials. The last century in the history of the north is mentioned only in passing toward the end of the book. The final chapter deals with Israelite population in Judah after 720 B.C.E., a phenomenon that was crucial for the shaping of the Hebrew Bible.

2. RECENT ADVANCES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

A clarification about chronology is in place here. Our knowledge of the chronology—both relative and absolute—of the Iron Age strata and monuments in the Levant has been truly revolutionized. In terms of relative chronology, intensification of the study of pottery assemblages from secure stratigraphic contexts at sites such as Megiddo and Tel Rehov in the north and Lachish in the south opened the way to establish a secure division of the Iron Age into six ceramic typology phases: early and late Iron I (Arie 2006; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2006), early and late Iron IIA (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004, 2006; Zimhoni 2004a; A. Mazar et al. 2005; Arie 2013), Iron IIB and Iron IIC (Zimhoni 2004b). In terms of absolute chronology, intensive radiocarbon studies enable accurate dating of these phases in a resolution of fifty years and less. This can now be done free of past arguments, which were based on uncritical reading of the biblical text (e.g., Yadin 1970; Dever 1997). In this book I will be using the dates that result from two studies:

(1) A statistical model based on a large number of radiocarbon determinations: 229 results from 143 samples that came from 38 strata at 18

sites located in both the north and south of Israel (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2010, based on Sharon et al. 2007 and other studies; table 1 here³). The radiocarbon results from Israel are the most intensive for such a short period of time and small piece of land ever presented in the archaeology of the ancient Near East.

Table 1: Dates of ceramic phases in the Levant and the transition between them according to recent radiocarbon results (based on a Bayesian model, 63 percent agreement between the model and the data)

Ceramic Phase	Date of Phase [B.C.E.]*	Transition between Phases [B.C.E.]
Late Bronze III	-1098	
		1125-1071
Early Iron I	1109-1047	
		1082-1037
Middle Iron I	1055-1028	
		1045-1021
Late Iron I	1037-913	
		960-899
Early Iron IIA	920-883	
		902-866
Late Iron IIA	886-760	
		785-748
Transitional Iron IIA/B	757-	

* The beginning of the first phase and the end of the last phase cannot be determined by the data at hand.

3. The model divides the period discussed in this book slightly differently from the six ceramic phases mentioned above. It adds the Late Bronze III, divides the Iron I into three rather than two phases, and ends with the late Iron IIA. The reason for the latter is the Hallstatt Plateau in the radiocarbon calibration curve, which prevents giving accurate dates to samples that come from Iron IIB and Iron IIC contexts.

(2) A statistical model for a single site—Megiddo: circa 100 radio-carbon determinations from about 60 samples for 10 layers at Megiddo, which cover circa 600 years between circa 1400 and 800 B.C.E. (Toffolo et al. forthcoming; demonstration in fig. 2). Megiddo is especially reliable for such a model because the time span in question features four major destruction layers that produced many organic samples from reliable contexts. This, too, is unprecedented: no other site has ever produced such a number of results for such a dense stratigraphic sequence.

The general model (table 1) represents a conservative approach for determining the dates. It creates certain overlaps in the dates of the phases and a fairly broad range for the transition periods. When this model is adapted to historical reasoning (e.g., the end of Egyptian rule in the Late Bronze III), one gets the following dates, which will be used in this book (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2011):

Late Bronze III: twelfth century until circa 1130 B.C.E.

Early Iron I: late twelfth century and first half of the eleventh century B.C.E.

Late Iron I: second half of the eleventh century and first half of the tenth century B.C.E.

Early Iron IIA: last decades of the tenth century and the early ninth century B.C.E.

Late Iron IIA: rest of the ninth century and the early eighth century B.C.E.

Iron IIB: rest of the eighth century and early seventh century B.C.E.

Several additional developments in the archaeology of the Levant in recent years facilitate the compilation of an archaeology-based history of the northern kingdom of Israel:

(1) The parting from the concept of a great united monarchy in the days of the founders of the Davidic dynasty. According to the Hebrew Bible and the traditional view in biblical and archaeological scholarship, which was founded on an uncritical reading of the biblical story, the united monarchy was ruled from Jerusalem and stretched over the entire land of Israel. According to some biblical references, probably depicting Iron Age realities, it extended from Dan to Beer-sheba (2 Sam 3:10; 1 Kgs 5:5). According to another version, probably inserted in the Persian period, it stretched across a much larger territory (1 Kgs 5:4). On the



Figure 2. The eastern and southern baulks of Area H at Megiddo, showing different layers and their relative and absolute dates.

side of biblical scholarship, it is clear today that the biblical idea of a great united monarchy is a literary construct that represents the territorial ideology, kingship concepts, and theological ideas of late monarchic, Judahite authors (e.g., Van Seters 1983, 307–12; Knauf 1991, 1997; Miller 1997; Niemann 1997; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006a). On the side of archaeology, it has become clear, among other reasons thanks to the radiocarbon studies mentioned above, that the monuments that were traditionally perceived as representing the great united monarchy of the tenth century B.C.E. were in fact built during the rule of the Omride dynasty in Israel in the ninth century B.C.E. (summary in Finkelstein 2010). This development in research brought about a new understanding of the days of the Omride kings—especially their building activities and the demographic structure of their kingdom. The demise of the united monarchy as a historical reality means that the two Hebrew kingdoms emerged parallel to each other, as neighbouring entities independent of each other, in line with the long-term history of the central highlands in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

(2) The advances in the study of relative and absolute chronology of the Iron Age strata in the Levant, as described above, are behind the rec-

ognition that in the northern valleys the Iron I still features “Canaanite” material culture and territorial disposition (ch. 1).

(3) The large scale surveys in the highlands, including the core area of the northern kingdom, make it possible to produce settlement maps for the different phases of the Iron Age and hence open the way for a nuanced understanding of the demographic, economic, and social changes involved in the rise of territorial north-Israelite entities.

3. THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

My involvement in the study of the northern kingdom stems from several stages in my career as a field archaeologist. The intensive archaeological survey that I conducted in the hill country north of Jerusalem in the 1980s brought to my attention the special nature of the highlands from the social and economic perspectives (for background, see Alt 1925b; Marfoe 1979). It also drew my attention to the intensity of Iron Age settlement activity in the areas north of Jerusalem relative to the territory south of it and to the cyclic, long-term nature of the settlement processes in the highlands (Finkelstein 1995). Needless to say, understanding the settlement history of the highlands in terms of cyclic history stands in contrast to a major concept of the biblical authors (followed by many modern scholars), namely, that ancient Israel was a unique phenomenon and that Israelite history was linear in nature, from conquest to settlement, to a period of charismatic leadership (the judges), to kingship and the rise of territorial kingdoms. Acknowledging all this also called my attention to French *Annales* historians (e.g., Bloch 1952; Braudel 1958), according to whom long-term processes and developments in the countryside are no less influential than momentous “events” such as military campaigns or affairs in the corridors of power in palace and temple. In short, the surveys in the highlands illuminated important historical processes such as the paucity of settlement activity in the Late Bronze Age, the nature of the wave of settlement in the Iron I, stability of settlement activity in most areas throughout the Iron Age as opposed to certain abandonment processes in one area (in the plateau of Gibeon) in the early Iron IIA, and settlement decline in southern Samaria after the fall of the northern kingdom in 720 B.C.E.

My excavations at the site of Shiloh in the early 1980s helped me understand the material culture in the highlands and the nature of the Iron I—the period of the emergence of ancient Israel (Finkelstein 1988). In addition, the results of the surveys and the excavation at Shiloh gradually

heightened my awareness of the complexity of the biblical sources on the early history of Israel.

Starting in the 1990s I turned to the lowlands and especially to the Jezreel Valley. The excavations I have conducted over the last twenty years together with colleagues and students at Megiddo opened the way for a better understanding of the Iron Age in the northern valleys.⁴ First and foremost, preparing for the dig at Megiddo I became aware of the problems in the traditional dating of the Iron Age strata and monuments in the Levant. This led me to propose the “low chronology” for the Iron Age (Finkelstein 1996a), a chronological system that is now supported by radiocarbon studies and that helped revolutionize what we know about the northern kingdom. The dig at Megiddo facilitated my understanding of other issues that are discussed in this book. One of them is the study of the end-phase of the Late Bronze Age in the northern valleys. Another is the exceptional—and until recently not fully understood—prosperity of the late Iron I, especially in the Jezreel Valley. I labeled this “swan song” of Canaanite material culture and territorial disposition “New Canaan,” a term that is now prevalent in scholarship. The dig at Megiddo also called for a renewed investigation of the transition from second- to first-millennium traits of material culture in the north (from Canaanite to Israelite, as some scholars refer to this process). Parallel to the dig at Megiddo I conducted—also with members of the Megiddo Expedition—two seasons of archaeological survey in the Jezreel Valley with the aim of understanding the settlement systems that corresponded to the main phases of occupation in the central site of Megiddo. The results of this work indicated the dramatic differences between the settlement history of the northern valleys and the central highlands.

In short, thirty years of fieldwork in both the highlands and lowlands of the northern kingdom paved the way for a new understanding of the archaeology and history of ancient Israel. This new understanding resulted in a series of articles that dealt with many aspects of Iron Age material culture, settlement transformations, and territorial history, which are all embedded (and cited) in this book.

4. For topics discussed in this book I am especially grateful to the following members of the Megiddo Expedition (past and present): co-directors David Ussishkin, Eric H. Cline, and Baruch Halpern; and senior team members Matthew J. Adams, Eran Arie, Norma Franklin, Yuval Gadot, and Mario A. S. Martin.