CHRONOLOGICAL AND SPATIAL CHANGES
IN THE RURAL SETTLEMENT SECTOR OF
ANCIENT ISRAEL DURING THE IRON AGE:
AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT
The rural settlement sector of Iron Age Israel did not attract much scholarly
attention, and although various discussions were published over the years, those
tended to be specific and did not present overall developments and trends. It is
therefore the aim of this article to present, for the first time, an overview on
this neglected settlement sector during the Iron Age. The article will review the
evidence, mainly on the basis of excavations, and will reconstruct the develop-
ments and changes this sector experienced at the time. The data will enable us
to discuss questions related to social structure on the one hand, and to assess the
influence of the various historical events and processes on rural settlement pat-
terns on the other hand. These processes include the Iron Age I settlement phe-
nomenon, the emergence of various polities in the Iron IIA, as well as the incor-
poration of the region within the Assyrian, and later Babylonian, empires.
Archeologists had always preferred to concentrate on excavating large, urban settlements and to devote attention to the sector in which "history" was created and written. Although villages and rural settlements were the most common type of settlement in the southern Levant during the Bronze and Iron ages, the "tell minded" modern scholarship tended to concentrate on excavating towns, and the study of the rural sector received relatively little scholarly attention.

The response to criticism regarding this neglect was by gradually stressing the significance of the survey as a methodology that sheds light on the rural sector. Indeed, extensive surveys were carried out over the years throughout the region, significantly enhancing our understanding of ancient settlement patterns and identifying numerous new sites. Despite their importance, however, surveys are inaccurate, tend to flatten settlement graphs, and to miss some important phenomena. Thus, surveys are only a partial compensation for scholarship's neglect of the rural sector.

At the same time, and despite the strong "urban bias" of Near Eastern Archaeology, more and more sites are being excavated in salvage excavation. Thousands of such excavations were carried out in Israel over the years, providing valuable insights into the rural sector.


3 For discussion and references see A. FAUST and Z. SAFRAI, "Salvage Excavations as a Source for Reconstructing Settlement History in Ancient Israel," PEQ 137 (2005), 139-158.
4 E.g., A. ZERTAL, The Manasseh Hill Country Survey (Tel Aviv 1992-2005) (Hebrew); I. FINNELSTEIN, Z. LEDERMAN and S. BUNIMOVITZ, Highlands of Many Cultures: The Southern Samaria Survey (Tel Aviv 1997); and others.
5 Faust and Safrai, "Salvage Excavations" and references.
6 London, "A Comparison of Two Life Styles."
the years, mainly in small rural sites, supplying us with a much better and more reliable data on the rural settlement sector. This, along with a few planned excavations conducted in rural sites, presents us with data from over 100 excavated Iron Age rural sites, and this enables us to discuss settlement processes and dynamics in this important sector. It is, thus, the aim of the present article to analyze long term settlement processes on the basis of the data that can be gleaned from an examination of the information on the rural settlement sector during the Iron Age – mainly excavated sites (and to some extent also on the basis of trends identified in surveys) – and especially on developments and changes through time and space.

THE IRON AGE I

When compared with the Late Bronze Age, the Iron Age experienced a sharp increase in the number – both absolute and relative – of rural sites, especially in the highlands.

The Late Bronze Age in general, was a period of small towns, and very few villages were excavated. The transition to the Iron Age witnessed some drastic changes. While some regions in the lowlands experienced continuity in general settlement patterns, e.g., in the northern valleys, and other exhibit even a decline, e.g., the Shephelah, the highlands were drastically transformed in this time, and hundreds of rural sites were established in areas that was only sparsely settled before. A few of these villages were

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Figure 1: A map with the sites mentioned in the text (note that the map does not present all Iron Age rural sites, but only those that are mentioned in the article).
excavated over the years, e.g., Giloh,11 Ai,12 Kh. Raddana,13 Shiloh,14 Karmiel,15 Kh. Za'akuka,16 Mt. Ebal,17 and many others (Figure 1). These excavations allow us a glimpse into life in those settlements, their social organization, family structure, ethnic identity, etc.18 The settlement process and the society in the highland, Israelite villages had received a great deal of scholarly attention,19 and is not of our concern here, except for its importance in setting the scene for the later development of Iron Age rural settlement patterns.

THE TRANSITION TO THE IRON II

Contrary to the common interpretation of surveys,20 the transition to the Iron II (regardless of its exact dating) witnessed a major break in the rural sector.21 Thus, most excavated Iron I sites were abandoned (or destroyed

12 I. Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 69–72 and additional references (for the sake of brevity, some of the references will be to I. Finkelstein, The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement [Jerusalem 1988]).
21 We do not wish to discuss here the Iron Age chronology (e.g., I. Finkelstein and E. Pisetzky, "The Iron Age Chronology Debate: Is the Gap Narrowing?", NEA 74 [2011] 50-53; A. Mazar, "The Iron Age Chronology Debate: Is the Gap Narrowing? Another Viewpoint", NEA 74 [2011] 105-11.), which is irrelevant for identifying the patterns discussed (though the debate is relevant for the interpretation of the patterns of course). Note that the dating of the abandonment of some the sites had been challenged, e.g., I. Finkelstein, "Iron Age I Khirbet et-Tell and Khirbet Raddana: Methodological
and deserted at the end of the Iron Age I or at the beginning of the Iron Age II. Moreover, none of the Iron I highland villages excavated so far continued to exist as a rural site in the Iron Age II. The following, mainly excavated, sites were abandoned (or destroyed): Izbet Sartah, Kh. Raddana, Ai, Shiloh, Kh. el-Maqatir, Giloh, Kh. Umm et-Tala, Kh. Za`akuka, Mt Ebal, the Bull Site, Tel Masos, Nahal Yatir, Tell el-Ful, Karmi`el, Ras-'Ali, Kh. Avot, Sasa' and

Lessons", in S.W. Crawford (ed.), *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Judah in Honor of Seymour Gitin* (Jerusalem 2007) 107-113, but what is important for the purposes of this article is the mere fact that even Finkelstein agrees that the sites were abandoned during the transition to the Iron II.


26 Eisenberg, "Khirbet Za`akuka".

27 Zertal, "An Early Iron Age Cultic Site".


32 Gal, Shalem and Hartal, "An Iron Age Site at Karmiel".


Tel Harashim,41 and the same is true for Qiryat Shemonah in the Hulah valley.42 Relatively few Iron I sites continued to exist during the early Iron II, and these expanded and became cities (at some point in the Iron IIIA, e.g., Megiddo/Tell el-Hesi, Tirzah/Tell el-Farah, north). Beth Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Dan, as well as Hazor in the Hulah valley, and probably also Tel Elah (note that not all the sites were probably Israelite in the Iron II). The situation in the northern valleys is more complex. At some point in the Iron IIA, sites such as Tel Qiri44 and Tel Hadar45 cease to exist. In the southern coastal plain there is also widespread abandonment, though slightly later, in the early stages of the Iron II.46

41 Z. Gál, "Tel Harashim (in 'Galilee, Chalcolithic to Persian Period')", in E. Stern (ed.), NEAEHL 2 (Jerusalem 1993b) 450.
42 K. Covello-Paran, 2012, "The Iron Age Occupation at Qiryat Shemona (Stratum IV)", in Y. Gadot and A. Yasur-Landa (eds.), Qiryat Shemona (S): Fort and Village in the Hula Valley (Tel-Aviv 2012) 88-119. It is clear that there were some exceptions to this rule, and there were a few rural sites that continued during Iron II.
44 A. Ben-Tor and Y. Portugalí, Tel Qiri (Qedem, 24) (Jerusalem 1987); A. Ben-Tor, "Qiri, Tel", NEAEHL 4 (1993) 1228-1229.
46 See general discussion in Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 230-254.
47 See also A. Faust, "From Regional Power to Peaceful Neighbor: Philistia in the Iron I-II Transition", IEJ 63 (2013a) 174-204 and a more detailed discussion below.
Scholars who have identified the phenomenon on the site, and even regional, level, have advanced various reasons for the disjunction in occupation, e.g., for the settlement in Giloh, Shiloh, Kedesh, Iblin, Safed, and others.\(^{48}\) Gal, for example, offered a relatively wider explanation in regard to the abandonment of several sites in the Galilee, and according to him they were abandoned because fortified settlements, now established in more appropriate locations, became the standard settlement type during the Iron Age II.\(^{49}\) Few scholars, however, have identified the overall pattern of the abandonment process. Dever took the abandonment process of the Iron I sites to indicate the urbanization process of the tenth century,\(^{50}\) and Mazar, stated that “many settlements were deserted at the end of the eleventh century and beginning of the tenth century B.C.E.,” relating the transition to the concentration of the population in towns during the period of the monarchy.\(^{51}\) Indeed, it seems that the abandonment is too wide to be solved by any local, site level explanation.

The table below presents (mainly) excavated Iron Age rural sites throughout the country.\(^{52}\) While, largely a long and complex process, hardly any Iron I rural site continued to exist into the Iron II as a rural site (as noted, there are a few exceptions in the northern valleys, see note below), whereas the excavated Iron II rural sites, almost all located in new locations, were established much later. While the exact date of the abandonment varies, occupation ended either toward the end of the Iron I or in the very beginning of the Iron II. Thus, in most of the highlands the abandonment took place already during the Iron I, whereas in its periphery and in the areas around it the abandonment occurred only during the early phase of the Iron II.

The pattern is quite clear. Not only is there a break in the early Iron IA as well as in the Iron IB and early Iron IIA in the rural settlement, but occupation in the late part of the Iron Age II is much later and takes place in new sites. It is clear, therefore, that even if one wishes to contest the date of the countryside abandonment, or even its length, there was a severe crisis, which led to the abandonment of so many sites, which were not resettled in the Iron II.

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\(^{48}\) See references above; see also Faust, “Abandonment” and more references.
\(^{52}\) Not represented are Iron I villages that became towns in the Iron II.
The only exceptions are the northern valleys, which reveals a higher level of continuity (along with the break), probably resulting from the fact that area was settled by various ethnic groups, and experienced a different settlement trajectory.53

A crisis in the rural sector can be seen even in Philistia, where practically all the small sites were abandoned at some point in the early Iron IIA. This is true for Qubur el-Walayda, Nahal Patish, as well as the various haserim that were excavated over the years. 54 Notably, in Philistia the


Figure 2: A table showing the (schematic) chronology of Iron Age rural settlements. Note that while the end-date of the settlements are reasonably accurate, the foundation dates are much less so.
abandonment of the countryside was not only late, but was also accom-
pounded by the weakening of the urban sector too, where Edom, for exam-
ple, declined in importance and size, and sites like Tel Zippor were also
abandoned. One or two urban sites, however, grew in size, indicating that
full understanding of the process should take into account the different
settlement histories of the various parts of the country.55

It is clear that something happened during the transition to the Iron II.
In the past, Finkelstein and some of his colleagues attempted to deny
this pattern,56 but failed to mention even one excavated rural site that
continued to exist from the Iron I to the Iron II (Finkelstein relied on
the surveys). Given the excavation of well over 100 Iron Age rural sites,
the pattern is quite clear and straightforward. One might differ on the
explanation offered to the phenomenon, but the pattern itself is, in my
view, undeniable.

Discussion
Several conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the archaeological
evidence presented.

(1) During the transition from the Iron I to the Iron II a major change
in settlement pattern occurred. Almost all the excavated rural sites so
dominant in the Iron I ceased to exist during this time period; (2) This
process occurred in two stages, lasting about a century. The first stage
took place in the second half of the Iron I, mainly toward the end. The
second phase took place during the first decades of the Iron Age IIA;
(3) The two phases took place in different areas (Figure 3). The first
phase of the abandonment process occurred in the core of the highland,
namely Benjamin, Samaria, and perhaps northern Judah, while the sec-
ond phase took place in the remainder of the country, namely the Negev,
the Gideon, the southern coastal plain and even the western slopes
of Samaria; (4) At the Iron Age IIA a major process of urbanization

Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Homenage of Isaiah Finkelstein (Leiden 2008)
70-81. See also discussion in Proc. "From Regional Power".
55 See already C.S. E HRLICH, The Philistines in Transition: A History from ca. 1000-
730 B.C.E (Leiden 1996) 53-55; and especially Faust, "From Regional Power" for a
detailed discussion and additional references.
56 Finkelstein, "[De]formation of the Israelite State"; Herzog 2007; Silberman 2007;
Grabbe 2007, in A. Faust, "Forum: Rural Settlements, State Formation, and 'Bible and
Archaeology'" (with responses by Neil Asher Silberman, Lester L. Grabbe, Alex Joffe
and Ze'ev Herzog), NEA 70 (2007) 4-25.
Figure 3: A map showing selected Iron I sites and schematic phases of abandonment.
Avraham Faust began in ancient Israel (e.g., at Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, Hazor, Megiddo, at some point also Lachish, and more), which apparently started simultaneously with the second phase of the countryside abandon-
ment. In the past I suggested that it is likely that the first phase of the aban-
donment resulted from security problems. The second phase, most likely, might have partially resulted from forced settlement by the new polity, or indirectly through the lowest impact of the latter on other areas (i.e., similar to the above mentioned security problems). It appears that the above men-
tioned first phase—during which most of the central highlands sites were abandoned and the population started to concentrate in urban centers—constitutes a state formation process. In absolute terms (following the modified conventional chronology), this process lasted through part of the 11th century BCE and in the first decades (perhaps even first half) of the 10th century. The second phase, which took place during much of the 10th century BCE in the periphery of the highlands, was accompa-
nied by growing urbanization, which can partially be seen as "forced settlement", carried out by the newly established state. Or, in some cases, the processes were not a result of direct activity of the new polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia. The area was not within the political control of this polity, but indirectly resulted from its action, e.g., the decline of rural settlement in Philistia.


58 Clearly, this is a schematic description, of course, and some sites deviate from the general pattern. Still, the general outline clearly holds when examining the bulk of the data.

59 Faust, "Abandonment"; Faust, "Forum: Rural Settlements, State Formation, and 'Bible and Archaeology'.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 See Mazar, "The Iron Age."
CHRONOLOGICAL AND SPATIAL CHANGES

The Rural Sector in the Iron II

The vast majority of the Iron II rural settlements were newly established in this era, and did not continue from Iron I settlements.

The Highlands: Process of Resettlement

On the basis of the evidence from the excavated rural sites, it appears that the resettlement of the highlands was a slow process, beginning only during the 9th century BCE in the Kingdom of Israel (peaking in the 8th century in this area) and 8th-7th centuries in the kingdom of Judah. While the exact date of their establishment is not secure of course, as this stage is more difficult to ascertain, the overall trend is quite clear, and there was a clear chronological gap before new villages were established in new locations. The gap in time between the rural settlement of the Iron Age I and those of the Iron Age II, explains some obvious differences between the Iron I villages and the Iron II villages in terms of social organization, e.g., in family structure whereas extended families perhaps dwelt in compounds in the Iron I but in large dwellings in the Iron II.

Notably, such a process of resettlement is usually accompanied by the creation of genealogical lists, which aims at explaining and legitimating land ownership, and cautiously we may suggest that it is possible that parts of the biblical lists had their initial origins, although clearly not their later form, in this period.

The Northern Valleys: Continuity

As noted, some continuity was observed in excavated rural sites in the northern valleys. It appears that these sites were inhabited by Canaanites, and hence their different fate during the transition to the Iron II. The detailed information available from the excavations of some of these sites allows us to learn about the social structure in these villages, and to decipher the ethnic identity of the settlers. Thus, an examination of village planning, the size of the domestic units and their plan, the nature of structures built for cult purposes, along with other elements, suggest that the inhabitants were non-Israelites, and can be defined, broadly, as Canaanites.

belonging to the indigenous Canaanite population. Notably, it appears that for the inhabitants of these sites, not much changed when the region became part of the Israelite state in the Iron IAII. It is most likely that the settlers were simply retainers of the various city-states prior to the Israelite conquest of the region, and they simply received new overlords when it was finally incorporated into the kingdom of Israel.

Social Analysis of Iron Age II Rural Communities

Many excavated sites were exposed to a degree that allows a study of social organization (mainly in the 8th century BCE, and in Judah also in the 7th century). Most of the villages in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (e.g., Kh. Jemein, Bet Arye, Kh. Jarish) boast large four-room houses (with little variation in size within the settlement), well-organized industrial areas, boundary walls around the perimeter of the settlements, service systems, communal facilities for storage, and more. It appears that the archaeological evidence (which can be compared with the available historical sources) indicates that the rural community was composed of extended families, the biblical "extended families", living together in large four-room houses, and organized in large kinship groups, probably lineages (the biblical "mishpahah"). Standards of life in these villages seems to have been quite high when compared, for example, to most urban dwellers.

These communities should be regarded as corporate groups, and were probably led by the elders. Some villages were comprised of one lineage, e.g., one industrial area, but other larger, villages were inhabited by more than one lineage and boasted a number of industrial areas. These villages also had an organizing body, probably the village elders (which in other cases were also the lineage elders). These villages were independent, and belong to a type of village that was discussed at length elsewhere and labeled "communal villages."

64 A. Faust, "Ethnic Complexity in Northern Israel During the Iron Age II", PEQ 132 (2000a) 2-27; Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 230-254; see also Finkelstein, "State Formation in Israel and Judah": 44, 47, 48; Finkelstein and Silberman, "The Bible Unearthed": 191-192.


66 Faust, "The Rural Community"; Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 128-177 and references.

67 Faust, "The Rural Community"; cited elsewhere.
Not all the villages, however, belong to this type. In the northern valleys, for example, a different type of village was unearthed. As noted above, these villages (e.g., Tel Qiri, Nir David, Tel Hadar) exhibit differences in house plan and size, lack of boundary walls, absence of communal industrial areas, and more. Hundreds of life seem to have been much richer than in the above mentioned communal villages. On the basis of these finds, as well as their short history, it appears that the communal villages were more likely to be contemporary to the Iron Age settlements of the central and coastal plains, and that the inhabitants were Canaanites. These are the settlement in which not much changed when the area was conquered by the kingdom of Israel (above). The villages were just working the lands of the urban elite before the incorporation of the area within the kingdom of Israel, and continued to work the land for other landlords now. And this is, as noted, probably the reason why some of these villages continued to exist from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II without interruption.

Another small group of villages which seem to differ from the above type is the "fortress villages". This group includes a few hamlets that were erected below forts in the kingdom of Judah, e.g., at 'Arad,70 Kh. Abu el-Twein71 and Kh. el 'Id.72 Those villages do not exhibit any of the above mentioned features which can teach of community organization. There is no evidence for organization in production, storage, etc., and it appears that unlike the typical villages mentioned above, those villages did not host organized communities. Rather, what we see is just a concentration of houses, built near the fortresses in order to supply some of the needs of the functionaries, or soldiers stationed there, offer services, house families, or enjoy the safety offered by the forts. The inhabitants, however, were not part of a community, and this is clearly reflected in the finds.73

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69 See Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 230-254 and references.
In addition to these villages, one should also note the existence of many farmsteads at this time. Notably, farmsteads were a rare phenomenon until the 8th century, and it appears that the combination of larger population densities on the one hand, along with greater security and the existence of territorial states on the other hand, enabled the development of this phenomenon. Although more common in Judah (e.g., Nahal Zimra, Kh. Abu Shawan, French Hill, Noqdim) than in Israel, farmsteads were composed of a large four-room house, inhabited by an extended family. In most parts of the country the farmsteads were built as part of an enclosed compound, probably for security purposes; the closed courtyard also served as a corral. The exceptions to this rule are the farmsteads in the vicinity of Jerusalem, which were not built as part of such a compound. It appears that due to the high density of settlement (hundreds of farmsteads and settlements in a small region) in this area, low level security problems were less of a threat, and grazing could not have been a major component in the economy, hence making the compound obsolete.

Israel and Judah

Despite the overall similarities, there are some differences between the rural settlements in the two kingdoms. First of all, as already noted, it appears that the resettlement process in Israel was earlier than in Judah. In addition, and perhaps as a consequence, the rural sites in Israel were typically larger. Thus, in Israel the rural sector was composed mainly of villages of various sizes, most of them of medium (5-10 dunams) and even large (20-50 dunams) size, whereas in Judah we know mainly of small villages (some 5 dunams) and farmsteads (isolated structures). This seems to reflect the difference in size between the two kingdoms.

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74 O. Yoge, "Nahal Zimra", _Eretz Israel_ 15 (1985) 29-30 (Hebrew);

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Israel was much larger, and with a more developed settlement system and settlement hierarchy, whereas Judah was much smaller, with a less developed settlement system.77

**The Arrival of Empires: The End of the Iron Age Landscape**

**Destruction**

The gradual incorporation of the region within the Mesopotamian empires brought an end to the Iron Age rural landscape. As far as the kingdom of Israel is concerned, the rural sector was devastated already in the 8th century BCE, as can be seen in practically every village that was excavated in this kingdom, although some regions fared better than others.78

All in all 14 villages and farmsteads that existed in the Kingdom of Israel up to the Assyrian campaigns were excavated, and only 2 of those survived the Assyrian conquest.79 When examining the larger data set that includes both excavated sites and the results of surveys, it appears that the process was not uniform, and there is some continuity in the northern valleys and northern Samaria, whereas the Galilee and southern Samaria were thoroughly destroyed.80 In Judah, the rural settlement sector was already affected by the campaigns of Sennacherib of Assyria, and farmsteads were devastated. Most, however, were not affected, and the rural sector in Judah reached a peak in the 7th century BCE.81

While surviving the turmoil of the Assyrian conquest, the rural sector in Judah was annihilated almost completely during Nebuchadnezzar's campaign of 586 BCE. While many people no doubt survived the war, no community was unharmed, and all the rural settlements appear to have been affected. Most of the almost 70 rural sites that were excavated

77 Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 190-213.
78 Notably, in the kingdom of Israel there was a wave of destruction already in the 9th century BCE, as can be seen in practically every village that was excavated in this kingdom, although some regions fared better than others (e.g., Gal, "Lower Galilee during the Iron Age").
79 A. Faust, "Settlement, Economy and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test-Case", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (in press); one site appears to continue unharmed (Rosh Ha'ayin; R. Avner-Levy and H. Torge, "Rosh Ha-'Ayin", ESI (1999) 19:40*, 58-59; Hagit Torge, personal communication), one shows severe decline, but was probably still active (Tel Qiri; Ben-Tor and Portugali 1987: 103-105; 110, 116). Note that a third site shows signs of short term squatting (Tel Zeror; Kochavi 1993b), but was not a settlement at the time. All the others seem to have been destroyed or abandoned.
80 Faust, "Settlement, Economy, and Demography": 168-194.
81 A. Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 190-213.
in Judah were abandoned and not resettled, while a few show signs of occupation in the Persian period (about 7 sites, which comprises some 15% of the total), though even in those settlements activity was only on a very limited scale.82

The Imperial Era

Rural Settlements in the Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel Under Assyria

The Iron Age rural settlements did not recover from the Assyrian campaigns, and the overall evidence for continuity (in all settlement types) varies from limited (in some part of the kingdom of Israel after the Assyrian campaigns) to very limited or even bordering the incidental (in other regions). Notably, not only was some continuity in rural life observed under Neo-Assyrian rule in the Jezreel valley, e.g., in Tel Qiri83 and on the basis of surveys also in northern Samaria84 but a few tiny sites were even established at the time, perhaps by exiled population brought there by the Assyrians. This is best exemplified by the settlement on Samaria’s western foothill.85 Here, a large number of tiny rural sites (farmsteads) were established during the late 8th century, apparently only after the Assyrian conquest of the area. On the basis of the location of the sites, their form and the material culture unearthed in them (as well as the tablets unearthed at Tel Hadid), it appears that the settlers included some indigenous population from coastal plains and people who were brought from the Assyrians, exiled from other parts of the Assyrian empire.86 A few small

83 Ben-Tor and Portugali, “Tel Qiri”: 103-105; 110, 116; see also M. H. UT, “The Pottery”, in A. Ben-Tor and Y. Portugali (eds.), Tel Qiri (Qedem, 24) (Jerusalem 1987) 208, where the 7th century is missing altogether.
84 Zertal, “The Manasseh Hill”; though this data should be treated with care before excavations are carried out.
86 Faust, “Farmsteads in Western Samaria’s Foothills”; cf., N. NA’AMAN and R. ZADOK, “Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina in Light of Two Cuneiform Tablets from Tel Hadid”, Tel Aviv 27 (2000) 179-188.
sites were established in other parts of the country, e.g., in the Lower Galilee (one near Tel Ilia Zipori and the second near Horvat Yehuda). This was perhaps also the fate of Shiloh.

Still, despite these phenomena of exiled population settled in the countryside, rural settlement under Assyria rule was very limited.

Rural Settlements in the Territories of the Former Kingdom of Judah Under Babylonia

As noted, the rural sector in the kingdom of Judah was devastated in the Babylonian campaign of 586. Continuity was minimal, perhaps even incidental. No refugees were brought in by the Babylonians, so even this (demographically insignificant when compared to the demographics of the preceding century) mechanism did not exert an influence on the gloomy reality in this region.

This is not to say that there was no rural life. The countryside/fields were worked by both the remaining inhabitants in the devastated cities, as well as those in the remaining villages, and some regions exhibit limited settlement at the time.

Recovery after the Destruction

The recovery of the rural sector was a long and gradual process. While some regional variation can be identified, it appears that the resettlement lasted hundreds of years. The period of Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian rule did not witness any significant recovery (leaving aside the, demographically insignificant, settlement on the western slopes of Samaria, briefly mentioned above), and only during the Persian period can we identify growth in the rural sector. Notably, even this was limited not only in size, but also in geography, and some areas were sparsely settled even then. Only during the Hellenistic period, usually even its later part, did settlement in the rural sector reach its Iron Age size. The society during the entire period of imperial rule in the region (Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian) should be viewed as a post-collapse society, in the long process of gradual recovery.

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89 See Faust, “Settlement, Economy and Demography” and references.
90 Faust, “Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period”: 45-46, 235 and references.
The rural sector did not attract much scholarly attention over the years, but an examination of this neglected settlement segment reveals much not only about the rural society in the region, or even society at large, but even on political developments.

Due to the great interest of modern scholarship in the Israelite settlement phenomenon, it is well known that the settlement waves of the Iron Age I is an indication of the growth of new ethnic, and eventually political entities in the region (Israel, Moab, Ammon, etc.).

Less known is the crisis during the transition to the Iron Age II. It appears that in most parts of the country (we did not discuss here the development in Transjordan, but the processes there were similar) much of the rural sector was abandoned during the very end of the Iron I, and beginning of the Iron Age II. This was a wide-scale phenomenon, which should be connected with the interaction of various groups, and eventually also with the development of complex political entities in the region, and mainly the Israelite monarchy.

The resettlement of the rural sector was a gradual process. In the kingdom of Israel significant resettlement began during the 9th century, reaching a peak in the 8th century. In the kingdom of Judah, the resettlement was later, beginning probably (in significant numbers) only during the 8th century BCE, and reaching a peak in the 7th century.

The detailed archaeological evidence available enables us to learn a great deal about life in those settlements, and it appears that most villages were inhabited by kinship units, which owned and perhaps even worked the land communally. A few villages differed, however. In the kingdom of Israel a relatively large number of Canaanites continued to live, and some villages excavated in the northern valleys were probably settled by Canaanite population which worked royal land, or the land of urban landowners. The kingdom of Judah was relatively homogenous ethnically, but a few villages that were established below forts seem to represent a different settlement phenomenon. These villages were not part of the rural society, and it appears that the settlements were probably created as a by-product of the existence of the forts themselves, hence lacking any indication of community organization.

Notably, the late Iron Age also experienced, for the first time in the history of the region, the establishment of many farmsteads. While found in both kingdoms, farmsteads were much more prevalent in Judah, where they comprised the majority of the rural sector. The farmsteads, whether
part of a built complex (in most of the country) or situated in the landscape (near Jerusalem), were usually housed by large extended families. Notably, one can identify a number of differences between the rural landscapes of Israel and Judah. The resettlement processes began earlier in the former, and settlements there were typically larger in size (usually equalling in size villages) than in the latter (small villages and many farmsteads).

The rural sector in both kingdoms was destroyed by the advancing Mesopotamian empires. That in Israel was devastated during the Assyrian campaigns in the 730’s and 720’s, while that in Judah was annihilated by Babylonians in 586 BCE. Although some refugees were brought by the Assyrians to the territories of the former kingdom of Israel, and some of these can apparently even be identified archaeologically, the countryside under Mesopotamian imperial rule was devastated, with only limited rural settlement scattered across the landscape. The recovery after the destruction was gradual, and took hundreds of years. Only in the Hellenistic period did the rural sector reach levels that were similar to that of the late Iron Age.