

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

BY

Avraham FAUST

The Institute of Archaeology
The Martin (Szusz) Department of Land
of Israel Studies and Archaeology
Bar-Ilan University
avraham.faust@biu.ac.il

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 developments 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 patterns on the other hand. These processes include the Iron Age I settlement phenomenon, the emergence of various polities in the Iron IIA, as well as the incorporation of the region within the Assyrian, and later Babylonian, empires.

SOMMAIRE

La question de la présence rurale d'Israël à l'Âge du Fer n'a pas beaucoup attiré l'attention des chercheurs, et bien que diverses analyses aient été publiées au fil des ans, celles-ci inclinaient à être trop spécifiques et ne présentaient pas globalement les développements et les tendances. C'est donc le but de cet article de présenter, pour la première fois, une vue d'ensemble de cette question négligée de la présence rurale d'Israël à l'Âge du Fer. L'article passe en revue les éléments de preuve, principalement sur la base de fouilles archéologiques, et

reconstitue les évolutions et les changements que cette présence a connus au fil du temps. Les données vont nous permettre d'examiner des questions liées à la structure sociale d'une part, et d'évaluer l'influence des divers événements et processus historiques sur les modèles d'établissement rural d'autre part. Ces analyses incluent le phénomène d'implantation rurale à l'Âge du Fer I, l'émergence de différents systèmes politiques à l'Âge du Fer IIA, ainsi que l'incorporation de la région au sein des empires assyrien, et, plus tard, babylonien.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeologists 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 settlements in the southern Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages, the "tell minded"¹ modern scholarship tended to concentrate on excavating towns, and the study of the rural sector received relatively little scholarly attention.²

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.³ Indeed, extensive surveys were carried out over the years throughout the region, significantly enhancing our understanding ancient settlement patterns and identifying numerous new sites.⁴ Despite their importance, however, surveys are inaccurate, tend to flatten settlement graphs, and to miss some important phenomena.⁵ 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,⁶ more and more sites are being excavated in salvage excavation. Thousands of such excavations were carried out in Israel over

¹ G. W. AHLSTROM, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (Leiden 1982) 25.

² G. A. LONDON, "A Comparison of Two Life Styles of the Late Second Millennium BC", *BASOR* 273 (1989) 37-55; A. FAUST, "The Rural Community in Ancient Israel during the Iron Age II", *BASOR* 317 (2000b) 17-39; A. FAUST, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II* (Winona Lake 2012b) and references.

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. FINKELSTEIN, 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.⁷ 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,⁸ and other exhibit even a decline, e.g., the Shephelah,⁹ the highlands were drastically transformed in this time, and hundreds of rural sites were established in areas that was only sparsely settled before.¹⁰ A few of those villages were

⁷ For settlement patterns, see R. GONEN, “The Late Bronze Age”, in A. BEN-TOR (ed.), *The Archaeology of Israel* (New Haven 1992) 211–257; S. BUNIMOVITZ, *The Land of Israel in the Late Bronze Age: A Case Study of Socio-Cultural Change in a Complex Society* (Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv 1990) (Hebrew); S. BUNIMOVITZ, “On the Edge of Empires – the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BCE)”, in T. E. LEVY (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London 1995) 320–331.

⁸ A. MAZAR, “The Iron Age I”, in A. BEN-TOR (ed.), *The Archaeology of Israel* (New Haven 1992) 296–297.

⁹ Y. DAGAN, *The Settlement in the Judean Shephela in the Second and First Millennium BCE: A Test-Case of Settlement Processes in A Geographic Region* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Tel Aviv 2000) 191 and fig. 16; Y. DAGAN, “Results of the Survey: Settlement Patterns in the Lachish Region”, in D. USSISHKIN, (ed.), *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)* (Tel Aviv 2004) 2680; A. FAUST, “The Shephelah in the Iron Age: A New Look on the Settlement of Judah”, *PEQ* 145 (2013b) 203–219.

¹⁰ I. FINKELSTEIN, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988); I. FINKELSTEIN, “The Great Transformation – The ‘Conquest’ of the Highland Frontiers and the Rise of the Territorial States”, in T.E. LEVY (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London 1995) 349–365.

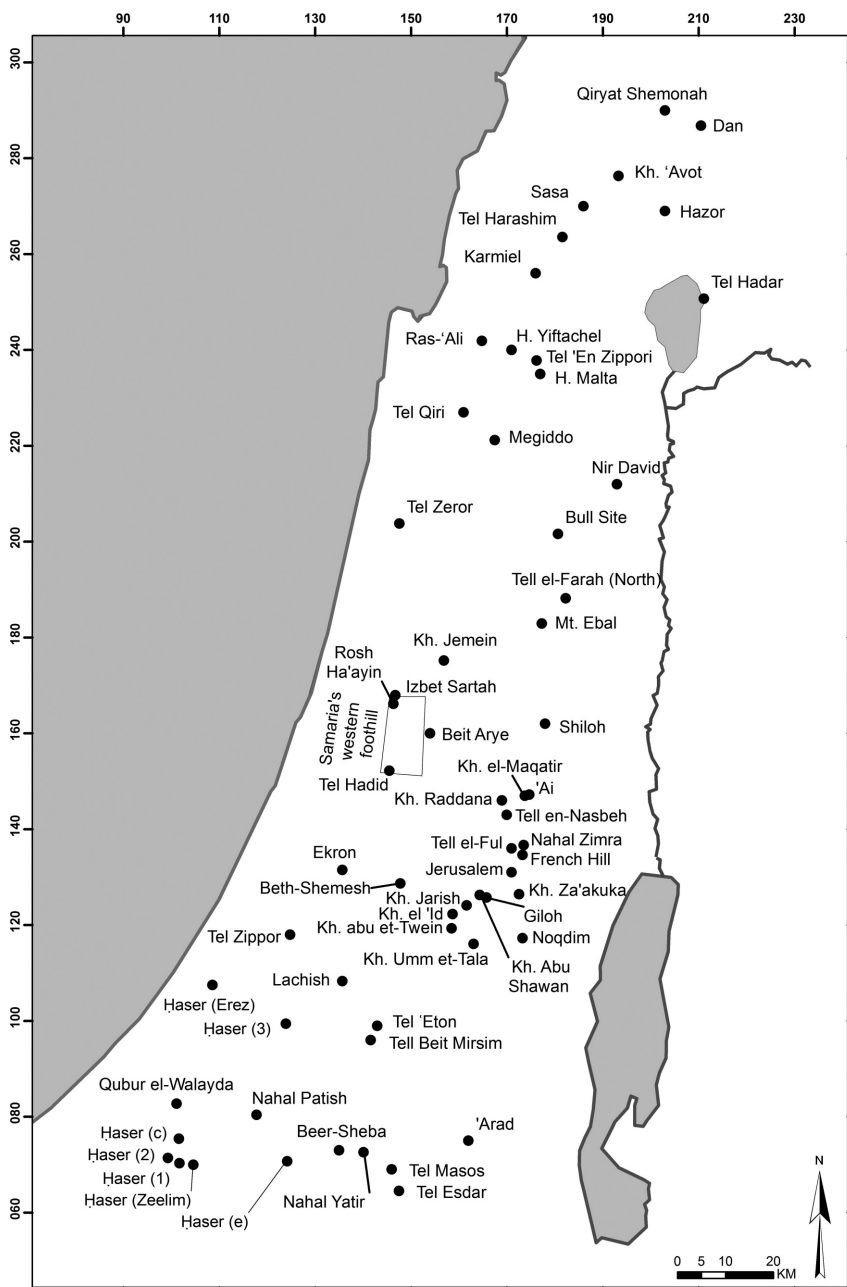


Figure 1: A map with the sites mentioned in the text (note that the map does not present all Iron Age rural sites, but only those that are mentioned in the article).

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

¹¹ A. MAZAR, “Giloh: An Early Israelite Settlement Site Near Jerusalem”, *IEJ* 31 (1981) 1–36.

¹² 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]).

¹³ Finkelstein, “The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement”: 67–69.

¹⁴ I. FINKELSTEIN, “Conclusions”, in I. FINKELSTEIN, S. BUNIMOVITZ and Z. LEDERMAN (eds.), *Shiloh, The Story of a Biblical Site* (Monographs Series of the Institute of Archaeology) (Tel Aviv 1993) 371–393.

¹⁵ Z. GAL, D. SHALEM and M. HARTAL, “An Iron Age Site at Karmiel, Lower Galilee”, in S.W. CRAWFORD (ed.), *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Mediterranean in Honour of Seymour Gitin* (Jerusalem 2007) 119–134.

¹⁶ E. EISENBERG, “Khirbet Za’akuka: An Iron Age I Settlement between Jerusalem and Bethlehem”, *Atiqot* 71 (2012) 1*–20*.

¹⁷ A. ZERTAL, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal: Excavations Seasons 1982–1987”, *Tel Aviv* 13–14 (1986–1987) 105–165.

¹⁸ E.g., L.E. STAGER, “The Archeology of the Family in Ancient Israel”, *BASOR* 260 (1985) 1–35; G. LEHMANN, “Reconstructing the Social Landscape of Ancient Israel: Rural Marriage Alliances in the Central Hill Country”, *Tel Aviv* 31 (2004) 141–193; A. FAUST, *Israel’s Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London 2006b).

¹⁹ E.g., Stager, “The Archeology of the Family”; L.E. STAGER, “Forging an Identity: the Emergence of Ancient Israel”, in M.D. COOGAN (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York 1998) 123–175; Faust, “Israel’s Ethnogenesis” and many references.

²⁰ E.g., I. FINKELSTEIN, “[De]formation of the Israelite State: A Rejoinder on Methodology”, *NEA* 68 (2005) 202–208.

²¹ We do not wish to discuss here the Iron Age chronology (e.g., I. FINKELSTEIN and E. PIASETZKY, “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 of 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.²² 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,²³ Kh. Raddana,²⁴ Ai,²⁵ Shiloh,²⁶ Kh. el-Maqatir,²⁷ Giloh,²⁸ Kh. Umm et-Tala,²⁹ Kh. Za'akuka,³⁰ Mt Ebal,³¹ the Bull Site,³² Tell el-Ful,³³ Tel Masos,³⁴ Nahal Yatir,³⁵ Tel Esdar,³⁶ Karmi'el,³⁷ Ras-'Ali,³⁸ Kh. 'Avot,³⁹ Sasa⁴⁰ and

Lessons", in S.W. CRAWFORD (ed.), *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean 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.

²² See already Mazar, "The Iron Age I": 301; W.G. DEVER, "From Tribe to Nation: State Formation Processes in Ancient Israel", in S. MAZZONI (ed.), *Nuove Fondazioni Nel Vicino Oriente Antico, Realtà E Ideologia* (Pisa 1994) 218; W.G. DEVER, "Archaeology, Urbanism and the Rise of the Israelite State", in W.E. AUFRECHT, N.A. MIRAU and S.W. GAULEY (eds.), *Urbanism in Antiquity, From Mesopotamia to Crete* (Sheffield 1997) 182; A. FAUST, "Abandonment, Urbanization, Resettlement and the Formation of the Israelite State", *NEA* 60 (2003a) 147-161; 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; contra Finkelstein, "[De]formation of the Israelite State"; more below.

²³ I. FINKELSTEIN, *Izbet Sartah: An Early Iron Age Site Near Rosh Ha'ayin, Israel* (BAR International Series 299) (Oxford 1986); Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 73-80.

²⁴ Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 67-69.

²⁵ Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 69-72.

²⁶ Finkelstein, "Conclusions".

²⁷ B.G. WOOD, "Khirbet el-Maqatir (notes and news)", *IEJ* 51 (2001) 246-252.

²⁸ Mazar, "Giloh".

²⁹ A. OFER, "'All the Hill Country of Judah': From a Settlement Fringe to a Prosperous Monarchy", in I. FINKELSTEIN and N. NA'AMAN (eds.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy* (Jerusalem 1994) 96.

³⁰ Eisenberg, "Khirbet Za'akuka".

³¹ Zertal, "An Early Iron Age Cultic Site".

³² A. MAZAR, "The 'Bull-Site' – An Iron Age I Open Cult Place", *BASOR* 247 (1982b) 27-42.

³³ Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 56-60.

³⁴ Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 41-46 and references.

³⁵ Y. GOVRIN, "The Nahal Yatir Site – Moladah in the Inheritance of the Tribe of Simeon?", *'Atiqot* 20 (1990) 22* (Hebrew).

³⁶ M. KOCHAVI, "Excavations at Tel Esdar", *'Atiqot* 5 (1969) 45 (Hebrew with an English abstract).

³⁷ Gal, Shalem and Hartal, "An Iron Age Site at Karmiel".

³⁸ Z. GAL, *Lower Galilee during the Iron Age* (ASOR Dissertation Series, 8) (Winona Lake 1992) 94-96, see also pp. 20-21.

³⁹ Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 105; E. BRAUN, "Avot, Horvat", in E. STERN (ed.) *NEAEHL* 1 (Jerusalem 1993) 122-123; see also Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement": 101.

⁴⁰ Z. GAL, "Sasa (in 'Galilee, Chalcolithic to Persian Period')", in E. STERN (ed.), *NEAEHL* 2 (Jerusalem 1993a) 453; A. GOLANI and O. YOGEV, "The 1980 Excavations

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 IIA), e.g., Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh), Tirzah (Tell el-Farah, north), Beth Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Dan, as well as Hazor (in the Hulah valley) and probably also Tel 'Eton (note that not all the sites were probably Israelite in the Iron I).⁴³ The situation in the northern valleys is more complex. Some sites continue to exist, for example, Tel Qiri⁴⁴ and Tel Hadar,⁴⁵ while others, like the above mentioned site of Qiryat Shemonah in the Hulah valley (which seems to behave like the highlands) cease to exist.⁴⁶ In the southern coastal plain there is also widespread abandonment, though slightly later, in the early stages of the Iron II (below).⁴⁷

at Tel Sasa", 'Atiqot 28 (1996) 41–58; but see Y. STEPANSKY, D. SEGAL and I. CARMİ, "The 1993 Sounding at Tel Sasa: Excavation Report and Radiometric Dating", 'Atiqot 28 (1996) 63–76.

⁴¹ Z. GAL, "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 (s), Stratum IV", in Y. GADOT and A. YASUR-LANDAU (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 existed during the Iron I-II time-span. Still, the sample we possess is large enough, and it is quite clear that there was a drastic change during the transition from the Iron I to the Iron II. Thus, while I am positive that some exceptional sites be discovered in the future, given the large sample of excavated rural sites we already have it is extremely unlikely that the overall picture will change.

⁴³ For Beth-Shemesh, Tel 'Eton and Tell Beit Mirsim, see A. FAUST and H. KATZ, "Philistines, Israelites and Canaanites in the Southern Trough Valley during the Iron Age I", *Egypt and the Levant* 21 (2011) 231-247; S. BUNIMOVITZ and Z. LEDERMAN, "Canaanite resistance: the Philistines and Beth-Shemesh – a case study from Iron Age I", *BASOR* 364 (2011) 37-51; for Mizpah, see J. ZORN, "Tell en-Nasbeh", in D. MASTER, et al. (eds.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology* volume 2 (New York 2013) 400-408; for Hazor, see A. BEN-TOR, "Hazor in the Tenth Century B.C.E.", *NEA* 76 (2013) 105-109; for Tirzah, see M. JASMIN, "Tel el-Farah (N)", in D. MASTER, et al. (eds.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology* volume 2 (New York 2013) 393-400; for Dan, see D. ILAN, "Dan", in D. MASTER, et al. (eds.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology* volume 1 (New York 2013) 245-254.

⁴⁴ A. BEN-TOR and Y. PORTUGALI, *Tel Qiri* (Qedem, 24) (Jerusalem 1987); A. BEN-TOR, "Qiri, Tel", *NEAEHL*, 4 (1993) 1228-1229.

⁴⁵ M. KOCHAVI, "The Golan During the Biblical Period", in A. DEGANI and M. INBAR (eds.), *Golan Heights and Mount Hermon* (Tel Aviv 1993) 285-298 (Hebrew).

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, Raddana, Izbet Sartah, Tel Masos (and several sites in the Beer-Sheba basin), 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, 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 clearly 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 more 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 IIA in the rural settlement, but the resettlement in the later 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.

⁴⁸ See references above; see also Faust, “Abandonment” and more references.

⁴⁹ Gal, “Lower Galilee during the Iron Age”: 94-96.

⁵⁰ Dever, “Archaeology”: 182; Dever, “From Tribe to Nation”: 218.

⁵¹ A. MAZAR, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York 1990) 338.

⁵² Not represented are Iron I villages that became towns in the Iron II.

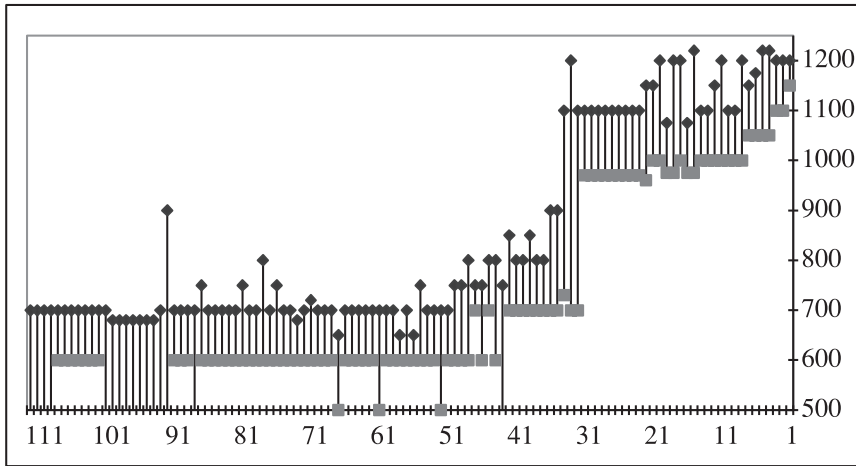


Figure 2: A table showing the (schematic) chronology of Iron Age rural settlements. Note that while the end-date of the settlements are reasonably accurate, the foundation dates are much less so.

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

⁵³ Cf., A. FAUST, "Ethnic Complexity in Northern Israel During the Iron Age II", *PEQ* 132 (2000a) 2-27; see also I. FINKELSTEIN, "State Formation in Israel and Judah: A Contrast in Context, A Contrast in Trajectory", *NEA* 62, 1 (1999) 44, 47, 48; I. FINKELSTEIN and N. A. SILBERMAN, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and Its Sacred Texts* (New York 2001) 191-192.

⁵⁴ G. LEHMANN, S. ROSEN, A. BERLEJUNG, B.-A. NEUMEIER and H. M. NIEMAN, "Excavations at Qubur al-Walaydah, 2007-2009", *Die Welt des Orients* 40 (2010) 137-59; P. NAHSHONI, Evidence for Cult in a Rural Shrine in the Northwestern Negev. Paper presented at a conference on Philistines in Southern Israel: New Studies (Beer Sheva 2008); P. NAHSHONI, "A Philistine Temple in the Northwestern Negev", *Qadmoniot* 42 (138) (2009) 88-92 (Hebrew); R. GOPHNA, "Iron Age *Haserim* in Southern Philistia", *Atiqot* 3 (1966) 46, 51 (Hebrew); D. GAZIT, "'En Sharuh: An Iron Age I Site in Nahal Besor", *Atiqot* 25 (1994) 41*-45* (Hebrew); D. GAZIT, "Permanent and Temporary Settlements in the South of the Lower Besor Region: Two Case Studies", in A. FANTALKIN and A. YASUR-LANDAU, (eds.), *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the*

abandonment of the countryside was not only later, but was also accompanied by the weakening of the urban sector too, where Ekron, for example 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 characteristic of 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 stages 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 Judea, while the second phase took place in the remainder of the country, namely the Negev, the Galilee, 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 Honour of Israel Finkelstein (Leiden 2008) 75-85; see detailed discussion in Faust, "From Regional Power".

⁵⁵ See already C.S. EHRLICH, *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.

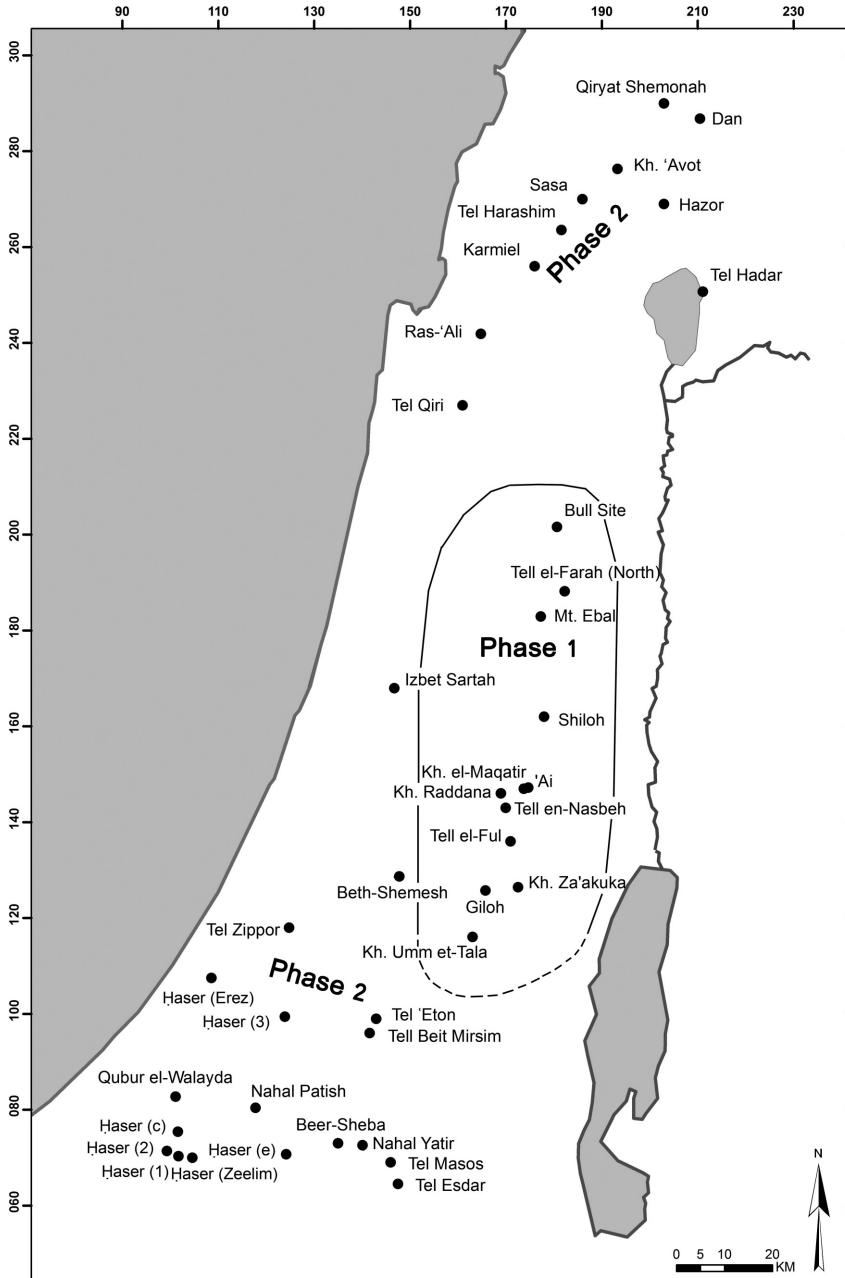


Figure 3: A map showing selected Iron I sites and schematic phases of abandonment.

began in ancient Israel (e.g., at Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, Hazor, Megiddo, at some point also Lachish, and more),⁵⁷ which apparently started simultaneously with the second phase of the countryside abandonment.⁵⁸

In the past I suggested that it is likely that the first phase of the abandonment resulted from security problems.⁵⁹ The second phase, most likely, might have partially resulted from forced settlement by the new polity, or from indirect impact of the latter on other areas (i.e., similar to the above mentioned security problems).⁶⁰ It appears that the above mentioned 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.⁶¹ In absolute terms (following the modified conventional chronology),⁶² 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 accompanied 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, and the decline probably resulted from its action on the broader political-military arena (and probably not directly upon these settlements).

⁵⁷ S. BUNIMOVITZ and Z. LEDERMAN, “The Iron Age Fortifications of Tel Beth Shemesh: A 1990–2000 Perspective”, *IEJ* 51 (2001) 121–147; R. GREENBERG, “New light on the early Iron Age at Tell Beit Mirsim”, *BASOR* 265 (1987) 55–80; A. BEN-TOR, “Hazor in the Tenth Century B.C.E.”, *NEA* 76 (2013) 105–109; D. USSISHKIN, “A Synopsis of the Stratigraphical, Chronological and Historical Issues”, in D. USSISHKIN (ed.), *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)* (Tel Aviv 2004) 50–119; D. USSISHKIN, “Megiddo”, in D. MASTER, et al. (eds.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology* volume 2 (New York 2013) 114–126; I used the term Iron IIA, in order to avoid the chronological debate. For identifying the processes that were operating, a relative chronology is sufficient (though for explaining them, one has to decide which of the two alternative “chronologies” is more suitable).

⁵⁸ Clearly, this is a schematic description, of course, and some sites deviate from the general pattern. Still, the general outlines 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”.

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 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.⁶³

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 those 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 plans, 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

⁶³ Cf., Stager, "The Archeology of the Family"; Faust, "The Rural Community"; Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 110-113, 159-166.

belonging to the indigenous Canaanite population.⁶⁴ Notably, it appears that for the inhabitants of those sites, not much changed when the region became part of the Israelite state in the Iron IAI. It is most likely that the settlers were simply vassals 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, Beit Arye, Kh. Jarish)⁶⁵ boast large four room houses (with little variation in size within the settlements), well-organized industrial areas, boundary walls around the perimeter of the settlements, terrace systems, communal facilities for storage, and more.⁶⁶ 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 *bet av*), living together in large four room houses, and organized in larger kinship groups, probably lineages (the biblical *mishpahah*). Standards of life in those villages seems to have been quite high (when compared, for example, to most urban dwellers), and there are no real signs of socioeconomic stratification there. Those communities should be regarded as corporate groups, and were probably led by the elders. Some villages were composed of one lineage (and had, 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”.⁶⁷

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.

⁶⁵ S. DAR, “Hirbet Jemein - a First Temple Village in Western Samaria”, in S. DAR and Z. SAFRAI (eds.), *Shomron Studies* (Tel Aviv 1986) 13-73 (Hebrew); S. RIKLIN, “Bet Arye”, *Atiqot* 32 (1997) 7-20 (Hebrew); D. AMIT, “Khirbet Jarish”, *ESI* 9 (1989-1990) 157-58.

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

⁶⁷ Faust, “The Archaeology of Israelite Society”: 128-177 and references.

Not all the villages, however, belongs to this type. In the northern valleys, for example, a different type of village was unearthed. As noted above, those villages (e.g., Tel Qiri, Nir David, Tel Hadar)⁶⁸ exhibit differences in house plan and size, lack of boundary walls, absence of communal industrial areas, and more. Standards of life seem to have been much lower than in the above mentioned communal villages. On the basis of those finds, as well as their history, it appears that the community in those villages was quite different from that in the above mentioned Israelite villages, and that the inhabitants were Canaanites. Those are the settlement in which not much changed when the area was conquered by the kingdom of Israel (above). The settlers 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.⁶⁹ 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 et-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

⁶⁸ A. BEN-TOR and Y. PORTUGALI, *Tel Qiri* (Qedem, 24) (Jerusalem 1987); G. EDELSTEIN, *Weavers' Settlement form the Unified Kingdom Period* (Nir David 1969) (Hebrew); M. KOCHAVI, "The Golan During the Biblical Period", in A. DEGANI and M. INBAR (eds.), *Golan Heights and Mount Hermon* (Tel Aviv 1993) 285-298 (Hebrew); see extended discussion in Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 130-154.

⁶⁹ See Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 230-254 and references.

⁷⁰ R. GOETHERT and R. AMIRAN, "A Salvage Excavation on the Slope of Tel Arad", *EI* 25 (1996) 112-115 (Hebrew).

⁷¹ A. MAZAR, "Iron Age Fortresses in the Judean Hills", *PEQ* 114 (1982a) 87-109.

⁷² Y. BARUCH, "Khirbet el-'Id: An Iron Age Fortress in North-West Mount Hebron", in Y. ESHEL (ed.), *Judea and Samaria Research Studies: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting* (Ariel & Qedumim 1997) 49-55 (Hebrew).

⁷³ Faust, "The Archaeology of Israelite Society": 178-189.

In addition to those 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)⁷⁴ than in Israel (e.g., H. Malta),⁷⁵ farmsteads were quite frequent at the time. Most 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.⁷⁶

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.

⁷⁴ O. YOGEV, "Nahal Zimra", *Khadashot Arkheologiyot* 87 (1985) 29-30 (Hebrew); Y. BARUCH, "A Farmstead from the End of the Iron Age and Installations at the Foot of Khirbat Abū Shawān", *'Atiqot* 56 (2007) 25-44, 71*-74*; G. MAZOR, "A Farmhouse from the Late Iron Age and the Second Temple Period in 'French Hill' North Jerusalem", *'Atiqot* 54 (2006) 1-14; Y. PELEG, "An Iron Age Site at Noqdim", in H. HIZMI and A. DE GROOT (eds.), *Burial Caves and Sites in Judea and Samaria from the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Jerusalem 2004) 189-205.

⁷⁵ K. COVELLO-PARAN, "Excavations at Horbat Malta, Lower Galilee", *'Atiqot* 59 (2008) 5-86.

⁷⁶ A. FAUST, "The Impact of Jerusalem's Expansion in the Forms of Rural Settlement in Its Vicinity", *Cathedra* 84 (1997) 53-62 (Hebrew); Faust, "Abandonment".

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 devastated.⁸⁰ In Judah, the rural settlement sector was partially affected by Sennacherib's campaign of 701, when a few villages and farmsteads were destroyed. 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 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 50 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, but the information available is somewhat limited, and we know more about the destruction of towns at this time (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 Turge, 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" and many references.

⁸¹ A. FAUST, "Settlement and Demography in seventh Century Judah and the Extent and Intensity of Sennacherib's Campaign", *PEQ* 140 (2008) 168-194.

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 Qiri,⁸³ and on the basis of surveys also in northern Samaria,⁸⁴ 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 plain and people who were brought there by the Assyrians, exiled from other parts of the Assyrian empire.⁸⁶ A few small

⁸² A. FAUST, *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation* (Atlanta 2012a) 33-72.

⁸³ Ben-Tor and Portugali, "Tel Qiri": 103-105; 110, 116; see also M. HUNT, "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 Manasse Hill"; though this data should be treated with care before excavations are carried out.

⁸⁵ I. FINKELSTEIN, "Israelite and Hellenistic Farms in the Foothills and in the Yarkon Basin", *EI* 15 (1981) 331-48 (Hebrew); A. FAUST, "Farmsteads in Western Samaria's Foothills: A Reexamination", in A.M. MAEIR and P. DE MIROSCHEJII (eds.), "*I will speak the riddles of ancient times*" (*Abiah chidot minei-kedem – Ps. 78:2b*): *Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake 2006a) 477-504.

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) 159-188.

sites were established in other parts of the country, e.g., in the Lower Galilee (one near Tel 'En Zippori and the second near Horvat Yiftachel)⁸⁷ and this was perhaps also the fate of Shiloh.⁸⁸

Still, despite those phenomena of exiled population settled in the countryside, rural settlement under Assyria rule was very limited.⁸⁹

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 demography 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 of course. 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.⁹⁰

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 real and 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 reached 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 a long process of gradual recovery.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Z. GAL, "The Lower Galilee between Tiglath Pileser III and the Beginning of the Persian Period", *EI* 29 (2009) 77-81 (Hebrew).

⁸⁸ Finkelstein, "Conclusions": 389.

⁸⁹ See Faust, "Settlement, Economy and Demography" and references.

⁹⁰ Faust, "Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period": 45-46, 235 and references.

⁹¹ Faust, "Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period"; cf., J. A. TAINTER, "Post-Collapse Societies", in G. BARKER (ed.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (London 1999) 988-1039.

SUMMARY

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 wave 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 IIA. 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 land-owners. The kingdom of Judah was relatively homogenous ethnically, but a few villages that were established below forts seem to represent a different settlement phenomenon. Those villages were not part of the rural society, and it appears that the settlements were gradually 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 landscape of Israel and Judah. The resettlement processes began earlier in the former, and settlement there were typically larger in size (usually medium to large 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 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 those can apparently even be identified archaeologically, the countryside under Mesopotamian imperial rule was devastated, with only limited rural settlements 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 reached levels that were similar to that of the late Iron Age.