From Sha'ar Hagolan to Shaaraim
Essays in Honor of Prof. Yosef Garfinkel

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משער הגולן לשעריים
מחקרים לכבוד פרופ׳ יוסף גרפינקל

Contents

HEBREW SECTION

Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Kingdom: Archaeological Evidence for Non-Centralized, Kinship-Based Components

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Abstract

In this study we reassess the character of the Judahite Kingdom during the Iron Age. As opposed to most past discussions of this monarchy, which define it as a highly centralized political structure, we suggest to identify various facets indicating that local elites played a major role in the societal and leadership structure of the Judahite Kingdom. We suggest that many of the supposed indices of centralized bureaucratic control that have been previously identified may in fact reflect the influence and control of local elites within the kingdom. We likewise believe that patronage-based relations, at different levels of society, were of central importance in the social and economic structure of the kingdom.

Attempts to define and understand the character of the Judahite Kingdom are as old as the study of the Bible itself. In recent years, a broad range of discussions dealing with multiple aspects relating to the Judahite Kingdom has emerged, utilizing many perspectives, sources and data sets.*

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* The honoree has contributed, directly and indirectly, to these discussions. His excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa and Lachish have added, and will add, important data and discussions on the early Judahite Kingdom, and his suggestions regarding the hierarchical pattern of the so-called "private seals" of Iron IIB Judah (Garfinkel 1985) are included in the discussion below. We are particularly glad to present this short contribution in honor of Yossi, as it includes aspects relating to Tell eṣ-Ṣafi/Gath and Tel Burna, which we excavate, along with that of Lachish, where Yossi is currently excavating. May Yossi have many more years of productive archaeological research!

In this brief study, we wish to contribute to this discussion, primarily from an archaeological perspective, moving away from much of what is often assumed about the character and basic structure of the Judahite Kingdom.

In the last few decades, more and more research has pointed out that the commonly held view of the Kingdom of Judah (and that of the Kingdom of Israel as well) is in need of revision. In the past, and in much of current research, the Judahite Kingdom is often depicted as a centralized political entity, a so-called bureaucratic state (more or less according to the definitions of V. Gordon Childe [1952]), which went through oscillations in its size and power during the various stage of the Iron II (ca. 10th to early 6th centuries BCE). Accordingly, this state, whose capital was in Jerusalem, ruled over the various parts of the kingdom. The kingdom manifested its rule through a web of main cities (e.g., Lachish), regional administrative centers (e.g., Tel Sheva), smaller governmental-related sites (e.g. "fortresses" of various types – see Faust 2012: 178–189), as well as structures at various sites that were connected to this centralized rule (e.g., so-called "governor's residencies", e.g., most recently, Faust and Katz 2015). All these facets were part of the centralized control of the Judahite Kingdom over the urban and rural sectors of its domain, which were divided into administrative districts that are reflected in the biblical texts (for a few examples of such viewpoints, see Fritz 1995; Isserlin 1998; Avishur and Heltzer 2000; Stern 2001; Dever 2012; Faust 2012; Hardin 2014; Master 2014). Unfortunately, many of these discussions do not take into account all the relevant data and theoretical interpretations, and it has been suggested (see Niemann 2008: 251) that many of these views reflect the use of largely anachronistic and inappropriate terms.[1]

So that we are not misunderstood, we would like to stress that there are clear aspects which do indicate some aspects of centralized rule, particularly during the later stages of the Judahite Kingdom (8th–7th centuries BCE), such as the bureaucratic structure behind the LMLK jars, or large-scale urban entities and related features, such as fortifications and massive structures (as in Jerusalem or Lachish; e.g., Frick 1977; Mazar 1990; Fritz 1995; Herzog 1997; de Geus 2003; Dever 2012). This said, we suggest that to a certain extent, these and other aspects should be seen as representing only a portion of the socio-political structure in this diversified kingdom. We believe that many of these features must be seen at a local level, which is then incorporated into a complex matrix of patron-client relations at all levels of this polity. By and large, the political-religious reforms that may have occurred in Judah in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE should be seen as attempts to impose a centralized authority on a very non-centralized kingdom.

The need to view the Judahite Kingdom as a less centralized polity is hardly a new idea. This has already been espoused in various forms by various scholars,

using various perspectives. Lemche (e.g., 1994; 1996; 2014) followed by others (e.g., Hobbs 1997; Simkins 1999; 2004; Pfoh 2009a; 2009b; 2014; Stansell 2011; Chaney 2014; Boer 2015; Lemos 2016), primarily based on the analysis of biblical sources and anthropological parallels, have suggested to view the Judahite Kingdom as a patronage kingdom. Somewhat similarly, Stager (e.g., 1985; 1998; 2003), Schloen (2001; 2016) and Master (2001), with a more pronounced emphasis on the archaeological materials, have defined the Judahite and Israelite states as "patrimonial kingdoms". Other suggestions abound as well, such as covenantal structures (Cross 1998: 3–21; Crook 2004; 2006; Esler 2006a), the importance of kinship structures (e.g., Halpern 1991; 1996; Bendor 1996; Levine 2003; Lehmann 2004; Lehmann and Niemann 2006; Vanderhooft 2009; Faust 2012), and the existence of large local estates ("latifundia") in late monarchic Judah (e.g., Bardtke 1971; Dearman 1988; Premnath 1988; Stansell 1988; but see Williamson 2006: 351–353; Radine 2012: 289–295).

Despite variations between these interpretations (at times of marginal significance), the basic idea behind these viewpoints is that the Judahite Kingdom was not a centralized state controlled solely by the king, who broadcasted power from his capital city through a well-structured bureaucratic structure. Rather, the very essence of the Judahite and Israelite polities was based on kinship (and in fact, household) oriented relations, which were structured into the various levels of Judahite and Israelite society. These kinship structures were based on patron-client and/or covenantal relations, and it is through these relations that the kingdoms existed, from local to supra-regional levels (see Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984).

Such approaches are hardly to be seen as unique to the Israelite/Judahite kingdoms, and in fact, as repeatedly demonstrated, appear to be quite typical of many ancient societies, including that of a broad spectrum of ancient Near Eastern examples (e.g., Schloen 2001; 2016; Westbrook 2005; Pfoh 2009b; Flammini 2010; Ur 2014).

In this light, in this brief note in honor of Yossi Garfinkel, we will examine in particular archaeological evidence, which seemingly strengthen the understanding of the Judahite Kingdom in a less centralized manner.

As noted above, the LMLK jars are seen as indicative of the central authority of the Iron II Judahite Kingdom (whether in the 8th century BCE, as usually assumed, or continuing into the 7th century BCE, as Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2010 have recently suggested). As pointed out in the past (e.g., Barkay and Vaughn 1996; Vaughn 1999; Maeir 2014b), to fully understand the LMLK stamps and the bureaucratic structure of which they are part, one must take into account the so-called "official seal impressions" (sometimes termed the "private

impressions") that are found on some of the handles of the LMLK jars (see now Na'aman 2016 who suggests that these "private names" reflect "estate owners" in Iron IIB Judah).

While, as previously noted (Maeir 2014b), we believe that Yossi Garfinkel's (1985) overall scheme of the hierarchical structure of the "private stamps" is hard to accept (following Vaughn 1999: 58–61), it may very well be that these stamps do reflect administration at the local/regional level, as opposed to most of the stamps that reflect state-level bureaucracy (see now Millard 2015).[2] This can be seen in the dispersal of some of the private stamps, such as the לרפאי/ יהוכל stamps that are found in and around Tell eṣ-Ṣafi/Gath (see Maeir 2014b) and the לצפן/עזר (at Lachish and Beth Shemesh) and לעזר/חגי (at Burna, Gezer and Azekahh) stamps found at a limited number of sites in the Shephelah (see Shai *et al.* 2014: 130–135). Interestingly, as noted for the לרפאי/יהוכל seals (Maeir 2014b), the name רפאי may reflect the continuing role of an elite local family in the Tell eṣ-Ṣafi/Gath region. The name רפא appears at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi/Gath in the 9th century BCE in a clear Philistine cultural context. If one accepts the connection between רפא and רפאי (the latter in a Judahite context of the late 8th century BCE), this may very well reflect persons who represent a family of high standing that played a prominent role in the local administration while the Philistine culture (and political domination) was evident in this area, but also after the Judahite takeover of the site and region.

Other examples of regional-level administrative practices in the Iron II can be noted as well. There is evidence of various types of stamped handles, with limited spatial and chronological distribution, from Iron II Judah. Examples of this are the cooking pots with "x" marks on the handles that are found primarily in and around Judah (Maeir 2010), cooking pots and other vessels from Judah with a unique "net-shaped" stamp (Shai, Ben-Shlomo and Maeir 2012), the so-called "fiscal bullae" of the Iron IIC (e.g., Deutsch 2012; 2015; Barkay 2015; Heide 2015), and very rare stamped handles such as those with a prancing horse (Barkay 1992). Due to the limited regional distribution, they may perhaps, as suggested by us in the past, reflect local bureaucratic structures of local elites within the Judahite Kingdom.[3]

To this one might add the anepigraphic bulla that have been reported from various sites in Judah, such as Khirbet Summeily (Hardin, Rollston and Blakely 2014; for this site see below), Iron IIA Jerusalem (Reich, Shukron and Lernau 2007) and Iron IIB Tel 'Eton (Faust and Eshel 2012). Both the lack of writing on these bulla and more significantly, their very limited distribution (limited so far to specific sites), would seem to indicate that these bulla reflect at most local (regional-level) "administrative" activities rather than state-level bureaucratic organization.
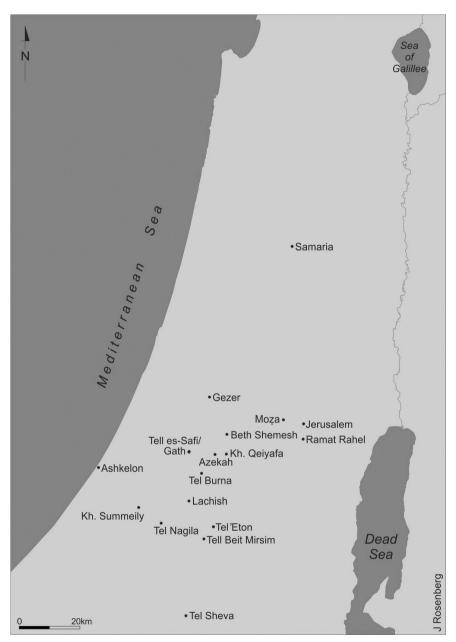
Fig. 1 Map of sites mentioned in the text

Such an interpretation, of local-level, kinship-based administrative struc-
tures, whose yields (e.g. various types of income) are then perhaps passed on, in
part, to the king in Jerusalem, may resemble some of the interpretations of the
economic structure behind the Samaria Ostraca. Such suggestions, which see

these not as a simplistic reflection of taxes delivered to the royal Israelite capital in Samaria but rather as clan-oriented payments as part of the patron-client relations between the Israelite king and various local elites (e.g., Niemann 2008; Nam 2012), would fit in very well with the situation we are suggesting for Judah.

Other archaeological and biblical evidence can perhaps be interpreted in a similar manner. Oversized buildings at various sites, such as at Tell Beit Mirsim (e.g., Dever 2012: 221–222) or Tel ʿEton (e.g., Faust and Katz 2015), might very well be the houses of local elites who did not serve as "governors" but perhaps rather functioned as local *mukhtars*.[4] These local leaders were not *per se* appointed officials of the central government but rather local leaders (perhaps the *zeqenim* of the Bible)[5] whose local dominance was *ipso facto* incorporated into the patron-client structure of the Judahite Kingdom.

Similarly, the various types of structures that have been identified as fortresses (e.g., Zwickel 1994; Dever 2012: 89–98; Faust 2012: 178–189) were most probably not all directly related to the central rule of the Judahite Kingdom. Faust (2012), who divided the fortresses into "real" and rural ones, nevertheless insisted that all relate to royal activities and control. As already hinted at by one of the authors in the past (Maeir 2013; 2014a), if one views at least some of the so-called rural ones as being related to local elites, this would explain why limited amount of centralized bureaucratic "devices" (such as LMLK handles) are known from these sites, and are even rarer in earlier periods (the 10th–9th centuries BCE).

A similar interpretation might be called for in the interpretation of recent finds at Khirbet Summeily (Hardin, Rollston and Blakely 2014). The excavators, on basis of the suggested dating (ca. 10th century BCE) and the Judahite character of the finds (although confirmation of both these issues awaits full publication of the finds) and the discovery of several anepigraphic bullae, suggested that this small site should be associated with the early Judahite state, which according to them already displayed elements of a "full blown state". As the evidence connecting the site with the Judahite monarchy is slight at best, one should perhaps see this site instead as a rural site under the patronage of a local leader, who in turn, depending on the overall geopolitical situation, could develop a patron-client relationship either with polities to the west (such as Philistine Ashkelon) or with newly developing polities to the east (such as Judah).[6] Thus, even if the site does have connections to the early Judahite Kingdom, this does not necessarily reflect a centralized bureaucratic structure of this early state.[7]

One could argue as well that the marriage patterns of the Judahite kings that are depicted in the biblical narrative may reflect this system (see Niemann 2006). The fact that the biblical text identifies quite a few of the wives of the kings of

Judah as coming from various parts of the Kingdom of Judah (and beyond) may very well indicate a policy of building patron-client relations through marriage pacts between the various regional elites. Just such a situation can be seen in the Shephelah: Ḥamutal, the wife of Josiah, was supposedly from Libnah (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18; Jer. 52:1), and Jedidah, Josiah's mother, was from the town of Bozkath (2 Kings 22:1), which is unidentified but otherwise located in the Lachish district of the Shephelah (Josh. 15:39).

It would be safe to assume that various local elites most probably changed loyalties over time. Just as the רפא family, as noted above, may have been first associated with the Philistines and later with the Judahites, other clans might have changed sides over time. A hint at this might be found in the depictions of the relationship between the Judahite Kingdom and the town of Libnah (Tel Burna?[8]). As noted above, Josiah's mother is attributed to this town, while on the other hand Libnah supposedly revolted against and was besieged by Jehoram (2 Kings 8:22; 2 Chron. 21:10). Perhaps, then, this reflects the ever-changing relations between this specific site and the Kingdom of Judah, situated in a region that traditionally vacillated between Judahite and Philistine control (on this point, see as well Blakely, Hardin and Master 2014).

Going back to the biblical narratives that supposedly depict even earlier stages in the development of Judahite society, one wonders whether (regardless of the actual historicity of this depiction) the depiction of the brigand David, escaping from Saul to Achish, King of Gath, can be seen as reflecting a complex system of shifting loyalties in the context of patron-client relations.

Finally, as noted above, the biblical description of the cult reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, if one accepts either or both as reflecting historical events (for various views on this, see, e.g., Hoffmann 1980; Handy 1995; Na'aman 1991; 2007; 2011; Barrick 2002; Fried 2002; Swanson 2002; Bae 2005; Uehlinger 2005; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006; Edelman 2008; Bloch-Smith 2009; Herzog 2010; Lemaire 2012; Pietsch 2013; Schoors 2013), might very well be seen in the context of an attempt to minimize the influence and powers of local-level leadership and local-level cultic manifestations (on this, see already Weber 1952, and more recently, e.g., Halpern 1991; 1996; Blenkinsopp 1997; Ackerman 2012; Zevit 2014; Nakhai 2015: 92–94) in the Judahite Kingdom, and the centralization of both cult and bureaucratic structure around the capital in Jerusalem. While many have discussed the cultic and administrative logic behind the reforms (see references above), we would suggest that the crucial underlying mechanisms behind the reforms were attempts to minimize local leadership and perhaps to refocus the traditional kinship-based configuration of the kingdom on that of a centralized administrative structure. While it is highly likely that the influence

of the Assyrian (and later Babylonian) imperial administrative structure may have brought about a shift to a more centralized administration in the Judahite Kingdom in the later phases of the Iron Age, we believe that the local Judahite elites continued to have strong influences during these phases as well.

In closing, we hope that these initial comments on some possible archaeological and textual hints at the complex nature of the structure of the Judahite Kingdom in the Iron II will foster additional discussion in the future. Yossi Garfinkel's continued excavations at Iron Age sites in Judah may very well provide pivotal data for this discussion.

Notes

1. What might be termed, following Kraft (2007: 17), "the tyranny of canonical assumptions."

2. The existence of regional-level bureaucracy and administration during the late Iron Age may also be reflected in the appearance of types of stamped handles, with limited spatial and chronology distribution, from Iron II Judah. See, e.g., Maeir 2010; Shai, Ben-Shlomo and Maeir 2012.

3. Moyal and Faust's (2015) recent reconstruction of the settlement hinterland of Iron II Jerusalem, and its hierarchy and typology, can perhaps be seen as evidence of the centralized control of only the immediate region surrounding Jerusalem during this period. Even so, one can wonder whether of the two sites that they define as "royal estates" (Moẓa and Ramat Raḥel), one of them (Moẓa) might have originated as the abode of a local, non-Jerusalem elite, as perhaps hinted at by the existence of a temple during the Iron IIA (see now Kisilevitz 2015), which during the later phases of the Iron Age might have been incorporated into the centralized political bureaucracy. It should be noted, though, that their typological distinction between towns, villages, farmsteads, and royal estates, based to a large extent on Faust's previous work (e.g. 2012), is not without problems, as e.g., Maeir (2013) and Schloen (2016) have stressed.

4. Save for Jerusalem, the only site at which an outstandingly large structure can be identified is at Lachish. The large podium structure at Lachish is clearly an exception when one looks at all other sites in the Judahite Kingdom during all stages of the Iron Age. Therefore, it is very likely that Lachish is related to centralized Judahite control, while at other sites we can speak only of structures relating to local elites.

5. The literature on the *zeqenim* is extensive; see, e.g., McKenzie 1959; Conrad 1980; Reviv 1989; McNutt 1999: 98–100; Fox 2000: 63–72; Willis 2001; Walzer 2008. See now as well Porter (2013: 106–111), who utilizes this term for understanding the patrimonial social structure in Iron Age Jordan.

6. Similarly, we previously suggested (Shai *et al.* 2011) that the Iron Age settlement at Tel Nagila, situated in the same region as Khirbet Summeily, changed its political and cultural affiliation between Philistia and Judah during the Iron Age II.

7. See now as well Lemos 2016, who argues that there is no reason to assume that the social structures of pre-monarchic Israel and Judah would have rapidly changed after the appearance of the monarchical polities.

8. For a detailed discussion of this identification, see Suriano, Shai and Uziel in press.

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