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Highlands or Lowlands?

Reexamining Demographic Processes in Iron Age Judah¹

Avraham Faust, Ramat-Gan

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Abstract

The settlement of Judah in the Iron Age had received a great deal of scholarly attention, and it is commonly agreed that after “humble beginnings” in the Iron Age I, Judah reached an unparalleled demographic peak in the later part of the Iron Age II. The Shephelah, the low hilly region to the west of the Judean highlands, is commonly regarded as the demographic and settlement hub of Judah. The present paper reassesses the relative importance of the various regions of Judah, and especially that of the highlands versus that of the Shephelah, during the various stages of the Iron Age. A thorough examination of the data reveals that the highlands, while underrepresented in the archaeological research, were center of settlement of Judah throughout the Iron Age, although at times the demographic difference between the regions was smaller than in others.

¹ The writing of this article was supported by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation (grant no. 884/08) on “Tel ‘Eton and Southern Trough Valley: A Barrier or a Bridge”. The examination of the situation in Tel ‘Eton and its vicinity revealed interesting patterns, which led to the present analysis.

The settlement of Judah in the Iron Age had received a great deal of scholarly attention (Ofer, 1993; 1998; Dagan, 1992; 2000, and many others). It is currently agreed that after “humble beginnings” in the Iron Age I (e. g., Finkelstein, 1988, 326–327; Ofer, 1998, 47), Judah reached an unparalleled demographic peak in the later part of the Iron Age II (e. g., Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992; Ofer, 1993; 1998; Dagan 2000). While scholars debate the exact dating (i. e., 8th or 7th century BCE) of the demographic peak in some parts of Judah, i. e., the highlands (cf. Ofer, 1993; 1998; Finkelstein, 1994; Faust, 2008) and the Negev (cf. Finkelstein, 1994, 176; 1995, 144–149; Tahareani Sussely, 2007), there is a consensus that the densely settled region of the Shephelah suffered a major blow in the Assyrian campaigns of the late 8th century BCE, and did not recover. The peak of settlement in this important region was undoubtedly in the 8th century BCE (Dagan, 2000; Faust, 2008). It is commonly agreed that the Shephelah was, demographically, the central region in Judah, and the largest segment of the population concentrated in this area (e. g., Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52; see also Dagan, 2000). The destruction of what is commonly viewed as Judah’s demographic center in 701 is one of the reasons why many scholars regard the 8th century as the demographic peak in the history of the kingdom of Judah.

The present paper would like to reassess the relative importance of the various regions of Judah, and especially that of the highlands versus that of the Shephelah. This will be done by examining settlement processes in the region of Judah, comparing the Shephelah to the Judean highlands (to the south of Jerusalem), from the beginning the Iron Age until the end of the 8th century BCE,² and then analyzing the resulting patterns.³

Settlement and Demography in Iron Age II Judah: A Summary of Previous Research

Demographic estimations of the population in various parts of the Land of Israel were quite popular in the 1980’s and early 1990’s (e. g., Broshi, 1979; Broshi/

² For the settlement and demographic reality following Sennacherib’s campaign, see Faust, 2008 and references. See also Ofer, 1998, 50. The issue will be only briefly touched upon below.

³ While each of the discussed regions has its own geographical boundaries, we follow the definitions used by our predecessors in the research of those regions. Generally speaking, we follow the boundaries used by Broshi and Finkelstein (1992, 51), and by the surveys of those areas. The Shephelah data is derived from the various excavations that were carried out in the region, and from Dagan’s (2000) detailed survey. The data on the highlands is based on the excavations published in the area south of Jerusalem, and on Ofer’s (1993; 1998) survey of the Hebron hill-country. We must stress that the exact boundaries are not important, as in the main part of the article we compare processes and trends, and not figures.

Gophna, 1984; 1986; Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992). This can be seen as resulting from an indirect influence of the new archaeology, which aimed at quantifying the archaeological data, and it was facilitated by the wealth of information that was provided by the extensive surveys that were being carried out in many parts of the country at the time.⁴

Thus, for example, Broshi and Finkelstein estimated that during the middle of the 8th century BCE the population of Judah was about 110,000 people, and that some 50,000 people lived in the Shephelah, whereas 30,000 (or even less) people lived in the Judean highlands (Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52). Broshi and Finkelstein used all the published data that was available at the time, along with much of the unpublished data on the surveys that were carried out throughout the country, in order to arrive at this demographic estimate. They estimated the settled area that was identified in the excavations and surveys of each site, and combined the sizes of all sites to arrive at the overall settled area. To this, they added a conjecture of the settled area of sites that were not discovered in each region (on the basis of the intensity and area covered by the various surveys), and then multiplied the overall results with a density coefficient which they deemed most suitable for the period under discussion.

Notably, the results of the surveys of the Shephelah and the highlands were since then published in greater detail, and the demographic disparity between the two regions seems now even greater: In the Shephelah, Dagan identified 277 settlements from this period (and many additional find spots, see below), with a total settled area of 4187 dunams (Dagan, 2000, 203, 266). He uses a 25 people per dunam density coefficient (Dagan, 2000, 245), and estimates the population in the region as some 108,000 people (Dagan, 2000, 266, graph 25).⁵ In the Hebron hill country, by contrast, Ofer mentioned only 122 8th century settlements, with a settled area of some 860–930 dunams (Ofer, 1998, 46–47; with a high ceramic intensity). The total settled area, after adding corrective estimates for the un-surveyed parts of the region, is, according to Ofer, some 1550 dunams. Ofer, using a 30 people per dunam density coefficient, estimates that the number of inhabitants as some 46,500 people (Ofer, 1998, 51); should a 25 people per dunam density coefficient been used, like the one used in the Shephelah (and by Ofer for the previous periods), the number of inhabitants would have been some 38,750. The ratio, between the Shephelah and the highlands if we follow Dagan's and Ofer's figures, of settled dunams is almost 3:1.

It is not important for our purposes whether the numbers are correct, or

⁴ For a summary, see, e.g., Finkelstein, 1988, see also Broshi 1979; Broshi/Gophna, 1984; 1986; Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992; for detailed publications of the surveys, see Dagan, 1992; 2000; Ofer, 1993; Zertal, 1992–2005; Finkelstein/Bunimovitz/Lederman, 1997.

⁵ There is a small discrepancy between the figures, as multiplying the settled dunams with the 25 coefficient will result in about 105,000 only, but the difference is immaterial.

whether the density coefficient used by the scholars is appropriate, and even who calculated more accurately the settled dunams – none is probably accurate, and the figures can (and should) be disputed. The demographic trends, however, are viewed as more reliable, and merit some discussion (below). What is important is that all estimates consider the Shephelah to be the most important region in Judah as far as settlement and demography in the 8th century BCE are concerned, and it was even viewed as “one of the most densely inhabited areas in the Land of Israel” (Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52).

We believe, however, that the common view of the demography of Judah is based on biased and un-representative data, and that the demographic reality was different. In order to support this claim, however, we need to broaden the discussion chronologically, and we will begin our survey with an examination of the demographic data of the Iron Age I.

Disclaimer: It is my view that we cannot really estimate past populations. Exact numbers are meaningless and are based on a number of assumptions which might be all wrong. Multiplying unknown variables (e. g., the “real” number of sites, their sizes, and the appropriate density, which varies between sites) might result with possibilities that are hundreds of percent apart! Any attempt to estimate past population, even of *one* settlement, is very problematic and can result in 400 % differences.⁶ And it is of course far more difficult to estimate the population of a region. Still, the data does reflect demographic changes, and the identified *trends* are significant and must be addressed.

Since the trends do reflect changes in demography which are worthwhile studying, in the following I will refer to existing demographic estimates and will use them as a starting point of the discussion. I will use the most updated estimates of total settled areas, and will multiply these with the commonly used density coefficient of 25 (although both figures are suspected) in order to enable a comparison of periods and regions. This is not to suggest that I trust the figures. What is important for this article are the trends which are, in my view, more reliable, and especially the understanding of the relative importance of the

⁶ For the differences in the estimates of a single site, see e. g., Postgate, 1994; Faust, 2005b, and references. For the problems surrounding the attempts to identify the size of sites, see Faust/Katz, 2012, and references. For various density coefficients, see e. g., Shiloh, 1980; Zorn, 1994; Postgate, 1994; Schloen, 2001 (some estimates are as high 120 people per dunam, and even higher). The problem of missing sites in surveys is well-known, and need not be addressed here in details. For discrepancies between survey excavations, see, e. g., Kh. el-Burj, 1973, 26; Bienkowski, 1998, 164; Dessel, 1999, 12–14; Cresson, 1999, 97; Paz et. al., 2010, 39; Garfinkel/Ganor, 2010; Wolff, 1998, 449 (a short list of additional examples of such misidentifications in the region discussed in this article is presented below). For a more systematic discussion with additional references, see also Faust/Safrai, 2005.

highlands versus the Shephelah. For this, I think that the available data and the patterns discussed below are sufficiently reliable.

Settlement in Judah during the Iron Age I

There was a surge of settlement in the highlands of the Land of Israel during the Iron Age I, especially when compared to the relative dearth of settlement in this region during the Late Bronze Age (e. g., Finkelstein, 1988; Bunimovitz, 1994). It is a well-known fact, however, that the settlement in the highlands of Judah was far more limited than in the more northern parts of the highlands (Finkelstein, 1988, 53, 326–327; Stager, 1998, 134, see also figures on 130–131, and table on 135). Still, many sites are known from excavations and surveys in the highland region of Judah (from just south of Jerusalem to the southern slopes of the Hebron Hill-country). Excavated sites in which Iron Age I material was found include Kh. Za'akuka (Eisenberg, 2012), Giloh (Mazar, 1981), Beth Zur (Funk, 1968), Hebron (Ofer, 1994; Chadwick, 2005), Allon Shvut (Jebel el Habun) (Amit, 2000),⁷ Kh. um et-Tala (Ofer, 1994, 96), and probably also Kh. Rabud (Kochavi, 1974) and others. Despite its extreme partiality (below), 18 settlements were discovered in Ofer's Judean Mountain survey (Ofer, 1998, 47). Ofer estimated the settled area of the known sites as some 185 dunams, and when the areas that were not surveyed are taken into account he estimated the settled area as 275 dunams (this does not include the area in the northern Hebron highland, which was outside his survey area) (Ofer, 1998, 51). According to a 25 people per dunam density coefficient, therefore, the number of inhabitants of the region was less than 7,000 people.

In the Shephelah, however, the Iron Age I is regarded as an extreme settlement nadir. While settlement in the region during the Late Bronze Age was significant, and many cities were excavated, the region was almost completely devoid of settlement during the Iron Age I. With the exception of the Philistine cities in the northwestern Shephelah (Tel es-Safi / Gath and Tel Batash/Timnah), and which were part of the coastal settlement system, settlement remains from this period were unearthed only at the excavated sites of Tel Beth-Shemesh (a large village), Tel Yarmuth (very limited occupation), Tel 'Eton (probably a mid-sized settlement) and Tell Beit Mirsim (limited occupation) (e. g., Dagan, 2000, fig. 16; see also Faust/Katz, 2011), and practically no additional settlements were identified in the comprehensive Shephelah survey.⁸ It is clear there-

⁷ The excavations took place at a miqveh at this site, but this led to a detailed survey, in which the Iron Age remains were unearthed.

⁸ Dagan, 2000, 191, see also fig. 16; A few "find spots" were observed, but Dagan did not interpret those as settlements, and given the evidence, he was right in so doing. The recent survey of Tel Burna (Uziel/Shai, 2010) discovered limited remains from this period (representing a great decline in comparison to the Late Bronze Age), and it is there-

fore that although some limited settlement existed in the trough valley (in the easternmost part of the Shephelah, just below the highlands), most of the Shephelah was devoid of significant settlement at the time. This void was significant enough, and Dagan did not even bother to offer population estimates for the Iron Age I (Dagan, 2000, 257, see also 275). Finkelstein, after using a corrective factor of 3, arrived at some 1,500 people for the population of the Shephelah.⁹ Notably, since all Iron Age I sites in the region were excavated, we may suggest (on the basis of the above mentioned density coefficient, and it does not matter for our purposes how accurate they are, since the figures are presented for comparative purposes only) that the settlement in the Shephelah (excluding the Philistine sites in the west)¹⁰ could have been (at most) something like 1,500–2,000.¹¹

It has been suggested that this population was Canaanite, and that the remote trough valley served as an enclave in which this population found refuge at this troubled time (see detailed discussion in Faust/Katz, 2011; see also Greenberg, 1987; Bunimovitz/Lederman, 2011). Clearly, settlement in the Shephelah during the Iron Age I was much smaller than that of the highlands.

The Sources of Population in the Shephelah in the Iron Age II

We have seen that it is agreed that the Shephelah was densely settled in the 8th century, reaching an unparalleled settlement peak – more than 100,000 people according to Dagan (Dagan, 2000, 266), and even Broshi and Finkelstein, on the basis of much more limited data, estimated the population in the region as some

fore possible that the site, located on the western part of the Shephelah, a few km. from the coastal plain, should be added to the list. Notably, the excavations have so far failed to expose remains from this period, while strata from both the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age IIA were unearthened (e. g., Uziel/Shai, 2011), suggesting that we should await more data before firmer conclusions on the history of this site can be reached.

⁹ Finkelstein, 1988, 332. Notably, the Shephelah is well-known, and despite the fact that the region is studied intensively in the last 25 years, not much was added to Finkelstein's estimates. The situation in the highland is of course, different, and the region was, and still is, understudied (below)

¹⁰ These sites on the western edge of the region were part of a different ethnic and political unit, and their inclusion will only obliterate patterns. Still, from now on we will subtract Gath and Timnah from Dagan's estimates of the Shephelah's population (when such are supplied), in order to have the comparisons on equal footing.

¹¹ The Iron Age I Shephelah sites include Tell Beit Mirsim (we estimate no more than a 20 dunams village in the Iron Age I), Tel 'Eton (we estimate a 20 dunams settlement), Yarmout (Iron Age remains were discovered only in sounding 2, on the acropolis only, and we estimate its size as some 10 dunams) and Tel Beth-Shemesh (25 dunams). Most of the sites were probably not planned and settlement within them not dense.

50,000 people (Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52).

But since the Shephelah was almost empty in the Iron Age I, how was the demographic peak of the 8th century in the region created? It is likely that some of it resulted from natural increase, but since in the Iron Age I population in the region was so limited – 1,500–2,000 people at most – this is not likely to be the only, or even the major source – especially as the population of no other part of the country increased so dramatically.

Inevitably, some population migrated to the region during the Iron Age IIA. The two theoretically plausible sources of population are the nearby and more densely settled Philistine coastal plain and the Judean highlands.¹² Several lines of evidence suggest that it is the latter, rather than the former, that supplied the population of the Shephelah.

1. The region was part of the Kingdom of Judah in the Iron Age IIB, and hence it was relatively easy and simple to move from one region to the other. The affiliation with Judah was reported by practically all the excavators in the various sites and, furthermore, many of the traits, including such that are ethnically sensitive (cf., the abundance of four room houses and the lack of decoration on pottery; for the significance of those traits, see Faust, 2006, and references), were shared by the population that lived in the highlands and lowlands, indicating that the latter were Judahites. This is also indicated quite clearly by the written sources – both the Bible and the Assyrian sources – who view the region as part of Judah. This suggests that it is more likely that Judahites moved to this region, rather than Philistines, who immediately lost their ethnic traits and modes of behaviors, and quickly assimilated into the Judahite population (which wasn't there in the first place, so how could the Philistines assimilate into it?).
2. The Philistines' political and military power was significantly weakened at this time, and it appears that they withdrew westward.¹³ Their weakening is evident by the shrinkage in the size of some of their settlement (e. g., Ekron and probably also Ashkelon),¹⁴ the abandonment/destruction of others (e. g., Tel Zippor [Biran, 1993, 1526–27], Tel Mor [Dothan, 1993, 1073–1074; Barako 2007, 246], Qubur el-Walayda [Lehmann et. al., 2010, 151–154],

¹² The Beersheba valley is not a real candidate, as it was never a settlement hub (and this is true for the Iron Age I too, cf. Herzog, 1994). For a theoretical suggestion that the cause is immigration from the north, see below.

¹³ For the weakening of Philistia, see for example Stager, 1998, 171; Mazar, 2007, 135; Ehrlich, 1996, 53–55; 1997, 199–201; Faust, 2013a; forthcoming, and many additional references

¹⁴ Gath appears to have been the exception, and it was probably the major Philistine stronghold in the Iron Age IIA, and the place in which many of the Philistines traits were maintained (Faust/Lev-Tov, 2011; Faust, 2013a).

Nahal Patish [Nahshoni, 2008; 2009], Umm el Baqar [Nahshoni/Tallis, 2008], Tel Ma'aravim [Oren/Mazar, 1974; 1993], the haserim in the Negev [Gophna, 1966; Gazit, 1994; 1996, 14; 2008], and others),¹⁵ and by the changing nature of their ethnic boundary maintenance (e. g., Faust/Lev-Tov, 2011; 2014; Faust, 2013a; forthcoming; see also Stone, 1995; Uziel, 2007). The issue is addressed in details elsewhere (Faust, 2013a; 2013c; forthcoming), but we must stress that it is extremely unlikely that while the Philistines were pressed westward, large number of Philistines will move eastward, into the “empty” Shephelah.

3. As we will see below, at the beginning of the Iron Age II (Iron Age IIA) the population concentrated in the eastern part of the region, near the Judaeen Highlands (Dagan, 2000, 257; see also Faust, 2013a; 2013c), while the region between Philistia and the trough valley was still relatively sparsely settled. If the origin of the population was in Philistia, it is likely that there were larger concentration of population also in the central and western Shephelah.

Before proceeding to discuss the development of settlement in the Shephelah, we must address another theoretical source for the population in the Shephelah – the kingdom of Israel, and more specifically refugees from Samaria. While such a suggestion seems extremely unlikely, given the distance of the kingdom of Israel from most of the Shephelah (which is a long, north-south strip of land, most of which is quite remote from the kingdom of Israel), many scholars believe that demographic peak of Jerusalem in the late Iron Age is a result of such refugees, and hence we should consider the possibility that perhaps such refugees are also responsible for the demographic increase in the Shephelah. Before even examining this theoretical possibility, however, we must note that not all scholars accept the refugees hypothesis, on many grounds (e. g., Na'aman, 2007; Faust, 2005; Guillaume, 2008). So even the possibility that there was such a stream of refugees to Jerusalem is far from certain. Moreover, even if there were such refugees, and they are responsible for some of the demographic increase in Jerusalem, it is not permissible to assume that many reached the Shephelah. Jerusalem is very close to the southern settlements of the (former) kingdom of Israel, while the Shephelah is farther away (and the centrality of Jerusalem might have also been a factor). One should also remember that a significant part of the population of Israel died during the Assyrian campaigns, some were exiled, and a certain portion remained in Israel – how many could have left Israel and found refuge in Judah? And were they sufficient not only to fill Jerusalem, but also the Shephelah? This in itself is highly unlikely. More important for our purposes, however, is that Broshi and Finkelstein discussed not the late 8th century BCE, but the middle of that century – the year 750 (Broshi/Finkelstein,

¹⁵ For extended discussion and more references, see Faust, 2013a.

1992, 52, 53–54). Thus, the demographic peak, according to them, *precedes* the destruction of Israel in many years. It cannot, therefore, be attributed to immigrants from Israel. Finally, as we will see below, it is very clear that the resettlement of the Shephelah was gradual, and many settlements were established already in the Iron Age IIA. This can be seen even in the survey data, and is far more evident in the excavations, e. g., at Lachish (Dagan, 2000, 257; Ussishkin, 2004), Tel Zayit (Tappy, 2008a; 2009), Tel Burna (Shai et. al., 2012), and other sites (for a detailed discussion, see Faust 2013c). It is quite clear, therefore, that the source of (at least most of) the population was the highlands.

Clearly, the Shephelah became Judahite in the Iron Age II, and it is quite clear that some population immigrated into this region, and joined the (limited) local Canaanite population that was concentrated in the trough valley (Faust/Katz, 2011; Faust, 2012a; see also Bunimovitz/Lederman 2011; Greenberg, 1987). Notably, with the exception of Tell Beit Mirsim, Tel ‘Eton and Beth-She-mesh, all the other Iron Age II settlements in the Shephelah are new foundations (even if established on earlier, long deserted, sites). It is likely that this immigration is part of the process which pushed the Philistines westward, and is connected with the expansion of the highland polity,¹⁶ but this is beyond the scope of the present article (see Faust, 2013a; 2013c).

This reconstruction is further supported by an examination of the available evidence on the Iron Age IIA in the two regions.

The Settlement in Judah in Iron Age IIA

Notably, there are a number of methodological difficulties in assessing the available data on the Iron Age IIA. First of all, surveys are notoriously difficult in identifying this period, and for good reasons (Faust, 2003a; 2007; see also De Groot / Fadida, 2011, 161). There are no destruction layers nor many tombs from this period in Judah, and we are therefore not familiar with the typical pottery of the period – hence, it is difficult to identify it in surveys (see extensive discussion in Faust/Katz, 2012)¹⁷. In addition, the lack of destruction layers means that the amount of pottery which reaches the surface is smaller, when compared for example to the Iron Age IIB or IIC (8th and 7th centuries BCE) (Faust/Katz, 2012). This is also responsible for the fact that this period is far less known, even in excavations, than its successor (the Iron Age IIB).

Another technical problem in analyzing the data from the surveys lies with the fact that Dagan and Ofer divided the Iron Age II in a different way. Dagan

¹⁶ This is not to deny that a few settlers might have arrived from the west, but this was probably unimportant demographically

¹⁷ For a methodological discussion of the significance of destruction layers and large assemblages (which are usually unearthed in tombs), see also Faust/Katz, 2012.

divided it into Iron Age IIA (10th century), Iron Age IIB (9th–8th centuries) and Iron Age IIC (7th century), whereas Ofer used the following division: Iron Age IIA (mainly 10th century), Iron Age IIB (9th century), Iron Age IIC (8th century) and Iron Age IID (7th century). When comparing the reality in the Iron Age I or the 8th century the differences pose no problem for the analysis, but when comparing the 10th–9th centuries this might cause some confusion. It must be stressed that both surveys were published before debate over the chronology of the Iron Age became intensive, and before some agreement was reached on the development of Iron Age pottery. Thus, it is agreed today that the Iron Age IIA covered part of the 10th century (most of it, according to supporters of the traditional, or modified traditional chronology, and its later part, according to supporters of the low chronology), and most of the 9th century (most of it, according to the former school of thought, and practically all of it according to the second). This understanding allows us a better refinement in analyzing the results of the surveys. Following Mazar (2005; 2011) I include most of the 10th–9th centuries (from some point in the first half of the 10th century to some point in the second half of the 9th century) together, under the label of Iron Age IIA (the pottery is quite similar throughout the period, and only in excavations is it possible to distinguish early and late within it) (Herzog/Singer-Avitz, 2004; Katz/Faust, 2014). In the following I will compare Dagan's information on his Iron Age IIA settlement in the Shephelah (10th century in his terminology, but more likely representing also the 9th century following Mazar's understanding of the development of pottery, which is now widely accepted) with Ofer's data on the 9th century settlement in the highlands (i. e., the full development of the very same era ceramic horizon). Since the information on this period, as derived from the surveys, is very problematic to start with, the following might be viewed as a simple intellectual exercise, aims at showing a trend and strengthening the above presented interpretation.

Ofer identified some 86 settlements in the 9th century in the highlands, with some 380–550 settled dunams (Ofer, 1998, 46). The total estimated settled area, including the un-surveyed regions, was in his view 940 dunams, and the number of inhabitants some 23,500 people (see Ofer, 1998, 51). Dagan, by contrast, identified only 19 settlements in his Iron Age IIA (Dagan, 2000, 257, see also 186),¹⁸ and since two of the sites were part of Philistia (above), we should even count only 17. Dagan, who did not provide population estimates, notes the concentration of settlement in the eastern Shephelah (Dagan, 2000, 257), exactly the region in which Iron Age I settlement existed.¹⁹ It is quite clear, therefore, that

¹⁸ In addition, he identified 16 “find spots” and 1 burial (Dagan, 2000, 186).

¹⁹ The nature of the settlements in any of the regions is not easy to discern from the results of the surveys, but the excavations reveals that at least some of the settlement in the Shephelah became urban at the time. Thus, Tel Beth-Shemesh (Bunimovitz/Lederman, 2001; 2009), Tel Beit Mirsim (Albright, 1943; Greenberg, 1987) and Tel 'Eton (based

in this period (Iron Age IIA following the conventional, or modified conventional, chronology) settlement in the highlands was still much more significant than in the Shephelah (86 versus 17 settlements), although the Shephelah was more thoroughly surveyed (the gap, however, seems to have become smaller than in the Iron Age I).²⁰ That settlement growth in the Shephelah was more significant in the east further suggests that the population increase in the Shephelah resulted, to a large extent, from immigration from the highlands.

On the Process of Resettlement

This information on the Iron Age I and the Iron Age IIA clearly show that from the beginning of the Iron Age and at least until the end of the Iron Age IIA, the settlement in the highlands was more significant than that of the Shephelah and, furthermore, the former supplied the latter with population and is partially responsible for its resettlement and demographic growth.²¹

As far as settlement processes are concerned, we must first stress that it is unlikely that the resettlement in all the Shephelah sites took place concurrently, and it is much more plausible that it was a long and gradual process (e. g., in Lachish, see Ussishkin 2004). In such a case, then, the only settlements that are certain to have existed at the very beginning of the Iron Age IIA are the four settlement of the trough valley – Beth-Shemesh, Tel Yarmuth,²² Tel ʿEton and Tell Beit-Mirsim. While it is clear that a few new sites were settled already in the early stages of the process (e. g., Kh. Qeiyafa; Garfinkel/Ganor, 2010), this was a gradual process covering the entire Iron Age IIA and probably lingering into the Iron Age IIB (this might partially explain why the Iron Age IIA levels in

on the recent excavations by the author), which were villages in the previous era, all became fortified and larger in the early Iron Age IIA. And at least some of the new settlements also appeared to become urban at some point in the Iron Age IIA, e.g., Lachish (Ussishkin, 2004, 76–83; see also Ussishkin, 1993, 905; Mazar, 1997, 161–162; Mazar/Panitz-Cohen, 2001, 275; Tappy, 2009, 456–457; King, 2005, 36–47; Dever, 2005, 83–86, and references).

²⁰ Notably, even if one wishes to err at the site of caution, and compare Ofer's 10th century figures with Dagan's Iron Age IIA, then the highlands still had more settlements (though the gap narrows to 33 versus 17). We must reiterate that the correct comparison is the one conducted above (i.e., 86 versus 17).

²¹ In light of the settlement reality of the Shephelah, it is clear how problematic is Herzog and Singer-Avitz's (2004) suggestions that this is where the state was formed in Judah.

²² Previous summaries mentioned the absence of Iron Age II remains at the site (de Miroshedji, 1999, 17), but recent reanalysis indicate that the settlement continued into the Iron Age IIA. I am grateful for Michael Jasmin for giving me the information (the issue is discussed at length in the forthcoming final report).

many excavated sites in the Shephelah are relatively thin).²³ Thus, it appears that Tel Zayit, Lachish (level V) and others were settled already in the early Iron Age IIA, whereas other sites (such as Tel Harasim and perhaps Tel Burna) were probably settled only later in this period.²⁴ While the settlement in the Shephelah gradually increased in the Iron Age IIA, I must reiterate that it is clear that was still secondary to that of the highlands.

We have seen that the settlement and demographic picture changed dramatically in the 8th century BCE, when (according to the consensus) settlement in the Shephelah greatly exceeded that of the highland. Before reexamining the reality in the 8th century, we must note that the picture changed again in the 7th century.

The Iron Age IIC (7th century BCE)

The Shephelah was devastated by Sennacherib in 701 (Finkelstein, 1994; Faust, 2008, and references), and it appears that in the 7th century BCE the highlands were, as usual, more central as far as settlement and demography are concerned. According to Ofer there were 113 sites with some 1200 settled dunams in the highlands (after adding estimates for the un-surveyed regions) (Ofer, 1998, 47), and he estimated the population as some 30,000 people (Ofer, 1998, 51). In the Shephelah, on the other hand, Dagan identified only 84 settlements (including isolated structures) (Dagan, 2000, 210), and the estimated population is 33,700 (*ibid.*).²⁵ The number of sites in the Shephelah is far smaller than in the highlands, and while the number of estimated population is quite similar (the Shephelah estimates are slightly larger than those of the highlands), given that Ofer discusses only part of the highlands (more below), it is quite clear that settlement in the highlands was larger even according to those data.²⁶

²³ As noted, to this one could add the lack of destruction layers at the early phases of the Iron Age II, as this also adds to our limited information; for the importance of destruction events and their contribution to the archaeological record as identified in excavations and surveys, see extended discussion in Faust and Katz 2012.

²⁴ E. g., Tappy, 2008a; 2009 (Tel Zayit); Ussishkin, 2004, 76–83; Mazar / Panitz Cohen, 2001, 275; Tappy, 2009, 456–457; Herzog/Singer-Avitz, 2004, 220, 231 (Lachish, level V), Givon 2008 (Tel Harasim) and Shai et. al., 2012 (Tel Burna). See also Faust, 2013c; Katz/Faust 2014.

²⁵ Dagan (2000, appendix 3) estimated the size of Timnah as some 40 dunams, and hence 1000 should be subtracted from his estimates (as for Gath, Dagan estimated, correctly, that it was not significant at the time, and hence there is no need to subtract its population from Dagan's estimates).

²⁶ Ofer, 1998, 51; see extensive discussion in Faust, 2008. It must be stressed that the method of dating the sites to the 8th and 7th centuries artificially decreases the number of 7th century sites. This is especially crucial for Ofer's estimates of the highland settlers (since the Shephelah was indeed devastated by Sennacherib and the decrease is real), but

The Shephelah in the 8th Century Reexamined

It is only the Iron Age IIB (8th century) which according to the surveys presents a different reality, whereby settlement in the Shephelah exceeds that in the highlands – almost by a factor of three!!!

In light of the above presented data on the settlement reality in Iron Age Judah, in which the highland was always more settled than the Shephelah, it seems that this is improbable. Anyone who supports such a reconstruction should come up with an explanation not only for the strange pattern (for the Iron Age) in which the Shephelah is more central than the highlands, but also for such an unlikely increase in settlement from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age IIB in the region – from 1,500–2,000 to some 100,000 inhabitants.²⁷ Moreover, given the likelihood that the population of the Iron Age II Shephelah came from the highlands, what caused the majority of the population of the highlands to migrate to another region and to leave it under-populated? It is much more likely that only a minority migrated.

We would like to suggest, therefore, that the parity between the highlands and lowland during most of the Iron Age was much larger than described above (in favor of the highlands). This parity was only *reduced* (or even closed) during the 8th century, but the highlands remained the center of settlement in Judah even then. The implications are, of course, that the Shephelah was *never* the settlement hub of Judah.

We believe that the distorted picture which views the Shephelah in the 8th century BCE as the major settlement center of Judah, unlike all other parts of the Iron Age, when the Shephelah was clearly peripheral (according to those same studies), results from biased data and a problematic sampling strategy.

Discussion

First of all, we must acknowledge that we know much more about the Shephelah than about the highlands. This region was, and still is, extensively excavated and

since this is not our main issue in this article, we do not wish to develop it here, and will just state that the population at the time was much larger than the above figure (see also Finkelstein, 1994, 174–175; Faust, 2008, 180–181; more below).

²⁷ Dagan estimated the population of the entire Shephelah as 108,000 (also above), but since Tel Zafit's size was estimated as some 300 dunams and that of Timnah was about 40 dunams, then 8,500 people (following the density coefficient of 25 individuals per dunams, which is used by Dagan) should be subtracted from this figure (both sites were counted as part of Philistia in earlier periods, and in order to err at the side of caution it is better not to count them as part of the Shephelah in all periods). Again, the number is probably wrong, but we follow Dagan's figures, and should be consistent.

it was surveyed in detail, while the highland's survey was very partial and the region was hardly excavated. This leads modern scholarship to reconstruct the Shephelah as much more central.

Why We Know More about the Shephelah

Geopolitics and Research: it seems as if geopolitical reasons are probably the most significant factor leading to our biased sample, reducing the number of excavations in the highlands, whereas the Shephelah was (and is) being excavated intensively. Thus, for example, dozens of sites were chosen for excavation in the Shephelah over the years, from Gezer (by a number of expeditions – most of the site was excavated) in the northern extreme of the area, through Tel Beth-Shemesh (by three expeditions – most of the site was exposed), Timnah (Tel Batash), Ekron/Miqneh, Tel Yarmuth, Kh. Qeiyafa, Azeka, Khirbet er-Rasm, Tel Harasim, Gath (Tel Zafit / Safi), Tel Zayit, Tel Borna, Tel Goded, Tel Maresha, Lachish (by three expeditions), Kh. el-Qom, Tel 'Eton and Tell Beit Mirsim to Tel Halif in the southern edge of the area, bordering the Negev. Most of those projects were long-term enterprises, and many of the excavations are active now, or were at least active in recent years, hence supplying the archaeological community with a detailed and updated information, far surpassing the quality of the older excavations. In the Hebron hill country, on the other hand, hardly any site was excavated in planned, modern excavations. Kh. Rabud was briefly excavated more than 40 years ago, and on a very small scale. Small scale excavations took place also at Hebron (supplemented by salvage excavations; for salvage excavations, see more below). Larger excavations took place, during the British Mandate period at Beth Zur. The data on this region is therefore very limited, and is based on old excavations.²⁸

Moreover, even the survey of the Judean highlands was very partial (Ofer, 1993; 1998, 42) – in most of the area Ofer only visited already identified sites, and only two “maps” (each 10 × 10 km) were (relatively) systematically surveyed. The survey of the Shephelah, on the other hand, was a much longer and more thorough process. It lasted well over 20 years, and (in 2002) 63 % of the area were totally surveyed (Dagan, 2004, 2673).

The reason for the difference is clear. The Shephelah is a relatively “safe” region, whereas the highlands of Judah were unsafe throughout the 20th century. In addition, geopolitical problems and unclear political status lead to rarity of excavations in this region in recent decades.

It appears as if the Judean highlands are (archaeologically) the least known regions in the entire country, west of the Jordan (see also de Cree, 1999, 59),

²⁸ Many of the projects in the Shephelah are long term projects, and many of the sites were excavated by more than one expedition and with a wide exposure. In the highlands, on the other hand, all the excavations were relatively small-scale short-term expeditions, hence supplying only limited information.

and our knowledge of it is extremely limited. Thus, most recent salvage excavations of Iron Age sites in the region reveals new sites, not identified in previous surveys (either the sites were not found, or the Iron Age remains were not identified), e. g., at Khallat Umm Sira (e. g., Batz, 2006, 57; Peleg/Har-Even/Aronsham, 2011, 85), Sansanna (Peleg/Feller, 2004b; Batz, 2006, 61–62), Shim'a (Peleg/ Feller, 2004c), Nokdim (Peleg, 2004), Kh. Abu Shawan (Baruch, 2007), Har Gillo (west) (Peleg/Feller, 2004a), Metzadot Yehuda (Batz, 2006, 57) and others (see also Erlich, 2011, for Iron Age finds at Beit Kahl). This, in addition to the above mentioned Iron I sites at Kh. Za'akuka (Eisenberg, 2012) which was misdated in the survey to the Iron II (Kloner, 2000, 97*, 150 [site 106: 120]) and Allon Shvut (Jebel el Habun), which was not identified in the previous surveys (Amit, 2000, see above). As Yezerski (2013, 22) recently remarked that "... the southern Hebron Hills" is "an area that has never been thoroughly and systematically surveyed or excavated", adding that "[a]long the road to Hebron, one can see dozens of burial-cave entrances, which have never been researched or documented". This quote exemplifies the lack of knowledge of the region.

The totality of the area discussed: We must also note that when referring to the highlands, many scholars discuss only to part of the highlands, and even Ofer's survey is not only partial, but even its boundaries did not cover the entire highlands south of Jerusalem. Hence, the data treat only part of the highlands.

Destructions and preservations (post depositional history): The Shephelah was devastated in the Neo-Assyrian campaign in 701 (Blakely/Hardin, 2002; Finkelstein/Na'aman 2004; Faust, 2008). The destruction was widespread, and it appears as if no site was spared (it must be stressed that only some of the sites were resettled in the 7th century BCE, and this is the reason why the Neo-Babylonian destruction left much fewer remains in this area). Destruction contributes greatly to the number of sherds at the site, and consequently to ones that are collected in surveys. Such eras are therefore overrepresented in surveys (and excavations), and this is more significant when the destruction is in strata that are near the surface of the mounds, as is the case with the late Iron Age (see detailed discussion in Faust/Katz, 2012). The highlands, by contrast, were only partially destroyed at the time, and hence less material was unearthed in the surveys and even the remains uncovered in excavations are more partial (Finkelstein, 1994; Faust, 2008).

The fact that the Shephelah was only partially resettled in the 7th century (and in some cases the later, post-Iron Age occupation was much more limited in scope) further contributes to the preservations of the relevant strata not only in surveys, but also in excavations. In the highlands, by contrast, some sites were not destroyed at all, and even if a site was destroyed settlement resumed quickly and the 7th century (usually even on a larger scale) (Finkelstein, 1993, 59; 1994,

174–175; Faust, 2008, and references), hence obliterating the earlier remains.

One should also remember that in many cases there is a tendency in highland sites to construct buildings on bedrock, hence causing greater damage to earlier remains (Na'aman, 1996; see also Vaughn, 1999, 63; De Groot / Geva / Yezer-ski, 2003, 1).

Finally, many ancient mounds in the highlands are currently settled on. This led to further damage to the older remains on the one hand, and on the other greatly limits the possibility of research and excavations, hence leading to fewer remains, and of poorer quality.

“Technical” biases: differences in the way the different surveyors defined the size of the sites in the various periods is also a significant reason for creating the bias in our assessment of the relative importance of the different sites. Notably, Dagan and Ofer used different methods of calculating the area of the sites the surveyed for each period of occupation, and it appears that Dagan’s figures were relatively larger than those of Ofer.²⁹ It does not matter whose method is more accurate (none, probably, is). What is important is that the Shephelah received higher demographic estimates than the highlands due to this difference in method. We should therefore decrease the relative estimate of the settled dunams of the Shephelah, or increase that of the highlands, in all periods. This was partially a result of the intensity of the survey of the Shephelah, which greatly surpassed that of the highlands. Below we will also see that many find spots with Iron Age IIB pottery were not really settlements at the time, and the finds are a result of post-depositional processes (below; Faust/Katz, 2012). While Dagan’s meticulous field-work is exemplary, these find spots artificially increase the demographic “importance” of the Shephelah in the 8th century, and we should therefore “correct” the Shephelah figures down, when compared with those of the highlands. While this is less significant factor than the above in creating the scholarly bias, it still needs to be acknowledged, and is very significant when counting “sites”.

All the above means that we must treat the figures regarding the highlands as minimal, and add corrective measures when we try to estimate the population there.

Broshi and Finkelstein, as well as others, it seems, did not take the differences into account. Thus, they added some 15% to the estimated total area at **both regions** (i. e., both the highlands and the Shephelah) in order to compensate for the unknown sites (Broshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52), hence even increasing

²⁹ Note that Finkelstein, 1994, 173, lowered the former estimates.

the artificial gap between the regions.³⁰ As the Shephelah was intensively surveyed, it is likely that the vast majority of medium and even small scale sites were identified. In the highlands, on the other hand, it is likely that many medium size sites, let alone small ones, were not surveyed. To this, one might add the fact that small sites, which are more likely to be missed in surveys, were more prevalent in the highland than in the Shephelah during the Iron Age (Faust, 2013c; below), hence increasing the artificial disparity between the regions even further.

The possible “corrections” to the above biases are mere estimations, of course, and there is no way to check exactly, or even approximately, how much area we need to add. It seems to me, however, that the percentage that should have been added to the settlement in the highland should have been much higher than in the lowlands. Furthermore, the settled dunams, as presented in Dagan’s summary, are (relatively) too much, and the figures should be lowered.³¹

In summary, we have seen that there is a scholarly bias toward the Shephelah and it is likely that it is responsible for exaggerating the relative demographic importance of this region during the 8th century BCE. In all other Iron Age phases – Iron Age I, Iron Age IIA and Iron Age IIC – there is an agreement that there were more settlements in the highlands and it formed the center of occupation, and there is no reason to assume that the situation was completely different during the Iron Age IIB. It appears that a few factors (above) joined in to create this impression. Below we will attempt to assess this bias, but in the meantime we would like to present additional lines of evidence which further support the reconstruction of the highlands as the settlement hub of Judah throughout the Iron Age.

The Highland as the Population Hub of Judah

Settlement patterns in the Shephelah during the Iron Age II: interestingly, settlement patterns in the Iron Age II Shephelah are very unique. On the basis of excavations (in contrast to surveys),³² it appears that settlement is composed of a

³⁰ They added 15 hectares to the 105 “known” hectares in the highlands. In the Shephelah the “known” sites were calculated as 136 hectares in the surveyed region and some 33.5 hectares in other parts of the region, i. e., a total of 169.5 hectares, and to this they added 30 hectares of “unknown” sites (Borshi/Finkelstein, 1992, 52). Thus, this correction increased the nominal gap between the two regions instead of decreasing it.

³¹ See above. It should be noted that this is not a criticism on Dagan’s work. There is no good way to calculate the size of the settlement in each period (especially in large-scale surveys), and the various formulas do not seem to work (Faust/Katz, 2012). Still, we must account for the different methods used by the two surveys. Furthermore, this should caution us against relying too heavily on surveys for demographic estimates.

³² In many cases, excavations of previously surveyed sites showed that the latter are not very reliable. Thus, the Iron Age I remains at Kh. Za’akuka in the northern Judean high-

large number of large and fortified *tells* (as excavated in the many planned excavations listed above), whereas the number of small, rural settlements located in the agricultural area is very limited – actually, hardly any is known to scholarship through excavations yet. Compare, for example, the various works on the rural settlements of this era in Israel and Judah (e. g., Faust, 1995; 1999; 2000; 2003a; 2003b; 2005a; 2012b; 2012c); those works failed to locate hardly any excavated village or farmstead in the Shephelah,³³ including in salvage excavations which are biased toward such sites.³⁴ Thus, some 50 excavated rural settlements in the late Iron Age in Judah were reported, but practically none of those was located in the Shephelah (Faust, 2012b, 33–72; 2012c, 128–177).

This unique pattern, in which the population lived only in large settlements, further suggests that the settlement in the Shephelah was not a result of an organic process of natural growth, but rather of a new population coming to the area, and settling in central sites and mounds.

lands were not identified prior to the excavations (Eisenberg, 2012), and so was the main phase of occupation at Kh. Qeiyafa (Garfinkel/Ganor, 2010). See also Kh. el-Burj, 1973, 26; Ben-Tor, 1987, 3; Bienkowski 1998, 164; Dessel, 1999, 12–14; Cresson, 1999, 97; Paz et al., 2010, 39; Wolff, 1998, 449; Covello-Paran, 2008; Gal, 2009; Peleg/Har-Even/Aronshtam, 2011, 85; Eisenberg, 2012; for a more detailed discussion, see Faust/Safrai, 2005; Faust/Katz, 2012. See more below. While we do not suggest that surveys should be ignored, they should be used with caution.

³³ Following the survey, Faust (2005a, 164) considered Kh. Qeiyafa to be a large Iron Age IIB village. As is well known today, both the date and the nature of the site were erroneous, and Kh. Qeiyafa is not a rural 8th century site. Some Iron Age II agricultural remains were reported recently in 'Aderet (Seligman 2008, 7–8), in the eastern Shephelah. Although their nature is not certain, it is possible that they belonged to a small hamlet or a farmstead. If so, this will be the first reported example of an excavated Iron Age II rural site in the Shephelah, and this clearly shows the anomaly. Recently, a 7th century structure was excavated between Horbat Hazzan and Horbat Avrak (Peretz/Talis, 2012). While this might have been a farmstead or another form of rural occupation, we must note that it was founded only in the 7th century BCE, after the area was devastated. Hence, neither its function (rural or not) nor its political affiliation (Judahite, or perhaps Philistine) can be discerned. At any event, it is clear that the site was not part of the rural hinterland of any Judahite city (and, at any event, dozens of rural sites are needed in order to compensate for the relative lack of such sites in the Shephelah). It must be stressed that it is clear that there were rural settlement in the Shephelah, and that more will be discovered in the future. Still, when compared to the highlands this form of settlement was rare in the Shephelah, and the future discovery of such sites will not alter the quantitative picture we possess.

³⁴ Faust, 1999; 2003a; Faust/Safrai, 2005; forthcoming. Even planned excavations, aimed at excavating a rural site in the region (conducted in the Shephelah due to the fact that it is simple to carry out excavations in this region, above) showed that it was not a rural site in the Iron Age (see Faust/Erlich, 2011).

The lack of rural sites uncovered in salvage excavations might also hint that many of the finds spots in surveys in the Shephelah, sometimes interpreted as rural settlements (but see Dagan, 2000, 202), do not represent real settlement.³⁵ The causes for the wide spread of Iron Age II pottery throughout the region, including outside settlements is quite clear. In most *tells* in the Shephelah, the uppermost level of significant occupation was that of the 8th century. Due to the Assyrian destruction, those levels were very thick, and produced a vast amount of sherds (for discussion, see Faust/Katz, 2012). In later eras, the local population used the soil from the mounds to fertilize the fields, and hence Iron Age IIB pottery was spread throughout the region (see also Dagan, 2000, 75–77). Taking soil from the mound for agricultural purposes is attested in many cases. Archaeologically, for example, this process was identified at Tel ʿEton (Faust, 2011; see also Faust/Katz, 2012), and this is supported by ethnographic observations (Wilkinson, 1989; Bull et. al., 2001; Bertoncello/Nuninger, 2010; see also Kenyon, 1957, 45; Dagan, 2000, 75–77). This was also the cause for the discovery of the texts at el Amarna and Nag Hammadi (e. g., Gardiner, 1964, 207–208; McDonald, 2009, 142, respectively). Clearly, many of the find-spots of 8th century pottery near large mounds do not really represent settlement, but resulted from soil taken from these nearby mounds to fertilize the fields.

The above clearly shows that the fact that many cities existed in the 8th century in the Shephelah does not suggest that each of them represents a complex settlement system with a dense hinterland. The lack of such finds in salvage excavations suggests that the pattern in the Shephelah was different from most of the country, and it seems as if this resulted from the fact that the Iron Age settlement in the Shephelah was not a result of gradual development over centuries, but of a shorter period of migration, and of the migrants settling the abandoned mounds.³⁶ The other side of this coin is that many of the finds below the *tells*, are to be explained by soil that was removed from the mounds to the fields, hence reducing the demographic estimations in this region.

The Progress of Administration in Judah: elsewhere, we have addressed the finding of small collection of bullae/sealings in the Assyrian destruction layer at Tel ʿEton, located in the trough valley between the highlands and the Shephelah (Faust, 2010; Faust, 2011, 210; see also Faust et. al., 2014).³⁷ While such (much larger) assemblages are known from the early 6th century BCE Babylonian de-

³⁵ It is not clear whether Dagan included “find spots” in his area calculations, or not. It appears that sometimes he did, and in other cases he did not (cf. Dagan, 2000, 186, 210, 223, 237, 273)

³⁶ Notably, given the density of the towns in this region and their proximity to each other, reconstructing too many villages and farmsteads between them is unnecessary.

³⁷ The collection is currently being prepared for publication.

struction layers at Lachish and Jerusalem (Aharoni, 1975; Shoham, 2000), and a large, earlier collection was incidentally discovered in the City of David (Reich/Shukrun, 2003; Reich/Shukrun/Lernau, 2007), no such collections are known from 8th century BCE destruction layers in Judah. A possible explanation, which I think is worth considering, for the scarcity of bullae in late 8th century contexts, is that the Shephelah was a relatively peripheral area within the kingdom of Judah at the time, and the more important sites concentrated in the highlands. Very few excavations, however, took place in the highlands (above), and moreover, the region was not destroyed by the Assyrians as thoroughly as the Shephelah (Faust, 2008, and references), hence decreasing the number of finds that can be unearthed and preserved from this era (especially bullae, as they can simply disintegrate unless burnt). It is possible, therefore, that the rarity of late 8th century bullae collections is a result of the fact that the Shephelah, on which we have plenty of data, was peripheral at the time; the highlands, where such bullae were supposedly more frequent, are relatively unknown, and, moreover, were only partially destroyed at the time (Faust, 2008, and references) – hence even the few excavations did not always reveal destruction layers, and the corresponding wealth of finds, from this sub-period. If this is so, then the “administrative technology” of bullae initially centered in the highlands, and gradually spread to the Shephelah, reaching this region mainly during the 7th century; Tel ʿEton, due to its location near the highlands (and probably its prominent position in the region) was among the first to be involved in the new “technology”. This further supports the notion that the central part of Judah in the 8th century was the highlands.³⁸

Joshua 15: Joshua 15, its dating and administrative significance, had received a great deal of scholarly attention, and there is a strong tendency to date the list to the 7th century BCE (e. g., Alt, 1925; Halpern, 1996, 324; Levin, 2006; Naʿaman, 1991, 5–33, with earlier literature. See also Rosel, 2011, 245–246). Still, this dating is problematic on various grounds, especially in light of the settlement reality in the Shephelah during the 7th century BCE – it is quite clear that the settlement in this region in the 7th century was too sparse to allow it to be the *sitz im leben* of the list of the Shephelah’s districts. Moreover, many sites (mentioned in the list) which in the past were regarded as dating to the 7th century only, and were therefore used to date the entire list to this period, are now understood to have been established already in the 8th century, e. g., in the Judean Desert (e. g., Finkelstein, 1994, 175; Vaughn, 1999, 72–74). Many of the reasons for the late dating are therefore discredited, and this is now leading to the

³⁸ It is clear that there were bullae in other 8th century sites, e. g., at Lachish, but the test is quantitative. When taking consideration the size of the area exposed and the thoroughness of the excavations, it is clear that the number of 8th century Bullae unearthed in the Shephelah is far less than one should have expected.

tendency of some scholars to date the sites to the 8th century BCE (see already Kallai, 1986, 115–124, 329–397; Galil, 1984; for an early date, see also Tappy, 2008b).

In the list, however, the number of settlements in the highlands (49 in 6 districts)³⁹ exceeds that of the Shephelah (39/40 in 3 districts), hence lending further support to the centrality of the highlands at this time.

It must be stressed that the exact number of sites is irrelevant, and so is the demographic reality behind each and every settlement.⁴⁰ The aim of this section was simply to show that the highlands were the center of settlement as reflected in this list.

The Demography of Judah

As noted above, I do not believe in counting ancient populations, and am not in a position to offer a “real” corrective figure to the above quoted estimates. It does seem, however, that the corrections offered in previous scholarship for our lack of familiarity with the highlands are insufficient, and should be increased dramatically, while the demography of the Shephelah in the 8th century was significantly exaggerated (relative to the highlands). We single out the 8th century, as it is the only Iron Age phase in which it had been suggested that the Shephelah was more settled than the highlands, and it is agreed that in all other phases the highlands had far more settlements.

As already noted, there is no way to prove what is the right correction. While I think the following figures are possible, and the trends are even very plausible, it must be stressed that the following discussion is only an intellectual exercise, aimed only to show what could have Judah’s demography looked like (with reservations, see below). For the sake of the discussion (and using the accepted density coefficients, whether they are correct or not) let us assume that Ofer’s figures should be increased only by a factor of 1.5. At the same time we will decrease the figures used by Dagan only to 60 % of his estimates, which is a very conservative decrease.⁴¹

The exercise will lead to the following results.

Iron Age I: In the Shephelah, there were some 1,500–2,000 people (above). In the highlands there were slightly over 10,000 people. We believe that the rel-

³⁹ We follow, of course, the Septuagint version of verse 59, which includes the missing district of Bethlehem, Tekoa etc.

⁴⁰ For the terminology, see also Faust, 2009.

⁴¹ Note that Finkelstein, 1994, 173, already lowered Dagan’s estimate. Notably, even the corrections should differ between the various sub-phases of the Iron Age, but this will make the exercise even more dangerous and we will therefore satisfy ourselves with the above very broad correction.

ative “correction” should have been much higher in this period,⁴² but stick to the above factor in order to err on the side of caution, and not to complicate the exercise any further.

Iron Age IIA: in the Shephelah there were some 10,000 inhabitants;⁴³ in the highlands there were about 35,000 people.⁴⁴

Iron Age IIB: in the Shephelah there were some 57,000 people;⁴⁵ in the highlands there were about 70,000 people. The huge increase in the Shephelah (almost by a factor of 6) must have been a result (in addition to natural growth) of continued immigration from the highlands supplemented by migration from other regions.

Iron Age IIC: in the Shephelah there were some 20,000 people;⁴⁶ in the highlands, there were some 45,000 people. In our view this relative highland figure is much lower than the real one (when compared to the 8th century – we do not relate to the actual figures of course), and results from Ofer’s “premise” that the 8th century was the peak of settlement. This influenced his ceramic dating and hence he underestimated the 7th century settlement (cf. Finkelstein, 1993; 1994; Faust, 2008), but this is beyond the scope of our immediate interest here.⁴⁷

We must reiterate that it is not our aim here to arrive at correct population estimates. We believe this is impossible, and the figures used might be very far from the truth. What we aimed to do was to show that the trends that are accepted by many scholars are nearly impossible, and require correction. The data can be manipulated in other ways, using different correcting figures, and the above

⁴² It seems that the correction (for the highlands) for this period should have been in a factor of 2 at least.

⁴³ Dagan did not calculate the population, and the figure is ours, based on his data, and omitting Gath and Timnah.

⁴⁴ This is based on the above calculation. We believe that the correction should have been slightly higher for this period.

⁴⁵ The initial estimate was slightly less than 65,000, but when Gath and Timnah were subtracted (300 dunams for the former and 40 for the latter, according to Dagan), we have reached a little bit over 56,000 (but rounded up the number) from his figures.

⁴⁶ Dagan did not estimate any population at Tel Zafit at the time. Tel Batash was estimated as some 40 dunams, hence we deducted about 1,000.

⁴⁷ Thus he treated the Iron Age IIB–C pottery assemblage as representing the Iron Age IIB, unless the few specific forms of the Iron Age IIC were unearthed (Finkelstein, 1994, 174–175; see also Faust, 2008). We do not correct Ofer’s bias, although this is requested, since we do not wish to arrive at exact or absolute figures, and our aim is only to correct a bias in the trends. It must be noted, however, that it is quite clear, in my view, that the peak of Iron Age settlement in the Judean highlands was in the 7th century BCE, and that the population then was larger than that of the 8th century BCE.

suggestion should be checked in light of the substantial data from excavation presented above. Or, in other words, do the *relative* trends that are created by the new figures make sense or not, in light of the better and detailed data from the many excavated sites. We believe that the corrected *trends* are securely grounded in the data, and the above was meant to convey how the demography of Judah could have looked like in terms of trends (with the above reservations).

Clearly, there is a substantial settlement increase in the highlands from the Iron Age I. The trend is clear, even if the figures are completely wrong. In the Shephelah, too, there is significant demographic increase at the time, but due to the low demography at the initial phase of the Iron Age I, it is clear that we do not witness only natural growth, and that the latter was accompanied by immigration from the highland throughout the Iron Age IIA, all the way to the 8th century BCE.⁴⁸

Summary and Conclusions

An examination of the settlement of Judah reveals that the highlands, although underrepresented in the archaeological research, were always the hub of settlement. This can be seen even in Dagan and Ofer original figures, before corrections and calibrations. Settlement in the highlands was more significant than in the Shephelah during the Iron Age I, Iron Age IIA and Iron Age IIC.⁴⁹ The only exception is the Iron Age IIB, in which the settlement in the Shephelah was, according to those scholar's figures, three time larger than in the highlands!

This is a very peculiar situation, and we believe it is practically impossible demographically. This reconstruction seems to result from biases in our knowledge and from the concentration of research in the Shephelah, and its dearth in the highlands. As we have seen, past population figures are influenced by those biases, and require correction. A reexamination of the data clearly show that even in the Iron Age IIB the settlement in the highland was more significant than in the Shephelah, and the gap (in favor of the highlands) in the other phases of the Iron Age was much larger than implied by Dagan and Ofer's estimates.

The highlands area is where the settlement started in the Iron Age I, at a time

⁴⁸ As noted, it is possible that some refugees from the former kingdom of Israel arrived in the late 8th century. But while such refugees might have been important in term of religious and even social and economic development, it is unlikely that they were demographically significant (e.g., Faust, 2005; Na'aman 2007; Guillaume, 2008; see also Faust, 2013b, and references).

⁴⁹ In the latter, the number of settlements in the highlands greatly exceeds that in the Shephelah. The estimated population was similar, with a small advantage to the latter, but one should remember not only the bias toward the 8th century in the interpretation, but also that only part of the highlands was surveyed (and even this only partially), as discussed above.

when the Shephelah was scarcely settled at all. During the Iron Age IIA the demography and settlement in the highlands continued to increase,⁵⁰ but some population seem to have moved to the almost empty Shephelah, probably as part of a colonization process. The immigrating population, however, settled in centrally located sites, on mounds, and was not dispersed across the landscape.⁵¹

Settlement in the highlands continued to increase in the Iron Age IIB, and the increase in the Shephelah was even greater. The highlands were still the political, administrative and demographic center of the kingdom of Judah, but the importance of the Shephelah increased dramatically at the time (partially as a result of immigration from the highlands; it is possible that the latter, being an ecologically somewhat fringe area, was close to the limits of its carrying capacity in the technological conditions of the time, and hence immigration is to be expected). The above clearly shows, however, that it is unlikely that the Shephelah was more settled than the highlands at this time, and it is in this period when the need to correct the commonly accepted settlement and demographic estimations is more apparent. The centrality of the highlands is also supported by the data we possess on the development of the administration in Judah, settlement forms in the highlands and lowlands, and even an analysis of Joshua 15.

Notably, by the close of the 8th century, the Shephelah was devastated by the Assyrians, and never regained its (relative) importance. The highlands suffered partial destruction at the time, but the archaeological data from excavations shows that it quickly recovered, reaching its settlement peak only in the late 7th or early 6th century BCE (partially, as a result of immigration from the Shephelah back to the highlands).⁵²

⁵⁰ Even if not as far as the number of sites were concerned, at least in the early Iron Age II; cf. Faust, 2003a; 2007. Notably, surveys seem to miss such fluctuations, and tend to flatten graphs (Faust, 2007). A discussion of the implication of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this article, and it is possible that the surveys reflect the peak of the end of the period (more research is needed if we would like to estimate the degree of their inaccuracy).

⁵¹ The population that lived in the towns cultivated the countryside, but dwelt in central settlements and not in villages and farmsteads unlike the common pattern in the highlands (this is also responsible to some social differences between lowlands and highlands; cf. Faust, 2012c). We must stress that there must have been some villages and farmsteads in the Shephelah, but those were far less common than in the highlands, probably due to the way the settlement developed in this region in the early Iron Age IIA.

⁵² This trend was not completely identified because we used Ofer's own numbers, and as we have seen he misunderstood the nature of the settlement in the 7th century (due to the way he dated sites to the 8th and 7th centuries; see criticism in Finkelstein, 1994, 174–175; see also Faust, 2008, 180–181). Whatever was the number of settlers in the area in the 8th century, it appears that it was higher in the 7th century BCE.

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