

ASSAF KLEIMAN

Beyond Israel and Aram

*Orientalische
Religionen in der Antike*

49

Mohr Siebeck

Orientalische Religionen in der Antike

Ägypten, Israel, Alter Orient

Oriental Religions in Antiquity

Egypt, Israel, Ancient Near East

(ORA)

Herausgegeben von / Edited by

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Assaf Kleiman

Beyond Israel and Aram

The Archaeology and History of Iron Age
Communities in the Central Levant

Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times V

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-161543-6 / eISBN 978-3-16-162012-6
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-162012-6

ISSN 1869-0513 / eISSN 2568-7492 (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen, and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

for Sabine and Irmi

Preface

This monograph is based on my Ph.D. dissertation written at Tel Aviv University under the guidance of Prof. Israel Finkelstein and Prof. Benjamin Sass. I wish to thank both of them for countless hours of fascinating conversations on archaeology, history, and modern life, and for making so many insightful comments on earlier drafts of my dissertation. Additional research, especially concerning the northern sectors of the Levant, was conducted during my postdoctoral studies at Leipzig University in 2020–2021. During these years, Prof. Angelika Berlejung, my host, was a source of tremendous support and constant encouragement in an ever-changing world.

It would not have been possible to accomplish the research without the help of my colleagues and friends (in alphabetic order): Prof. Erez Ben-Yosef (Tel Aviv University), Ms. Liora Bouzagalou (Tel Aviv University), Dr. Karen Covello-Paran (IAA), Prof. Alexander Fantalkin (Tel Aviv University), Dr. Liora Freud (Tel Aviv University), Dr. Ortal Harush (Hebrew University), Dr. Elon D. Heymans (Utrecht University), Dr. Ido Koch (Tel Aviv University), Prof. Aren M. Maeir (Bar-Ilan University), Ms. Myrna Pollak, Dr. Abra Spiciarich (Tel Aviv University), Ms. Juliane Stein (Leipzig University), Prof. Gunnar Lehmann (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and Prof. Jakob Wöhrle (University of Tübingen). Special thanks go to Dr. Eran Arie (Haifa University), Dr. Zachary C. Dunseth (Brown University), and Dr. Omer Sergi (Tel Aviv University) for showing good friendship all along the way. The following colleagues also graciously provided me with published and unpublished data: Ms. Deborah Ben-Ami (IAA), Prof. Amnon Ben-Tor (Hebrew University), Dr. Ron Beeri (IAA), Dr. Moshe Hartal (IAA), Dr. Jérôme Rohmer (CNRS), Ms. Debora Sandhaus (Tel Aviv University), Mr. Yosef Stepansky (IAA), Prof. Stefan Münger (University of Bern), Dr. Yifat Thareani (Hebrew Union College), Mr. Barak Tzin (IAA), and Dr. Šárka Velhartická (Ankara University). Prof. Oded Lipschits and Prof. Yuval Gadot (Tel Aviv University), in particular, offered much help and advice during my Ph.D. studies and afterward. Many of the ideas expressed in this book were presented in events of the Minerva Center for the Relations between Israel and Aram in Biblical Times (directed by Prof. Angelika Berlejung and Prof. Aren M. Maeir). The center has provided an excellent atmosphere for discussions on the archaeology and history of the Levant in the Bronze and Iron Ages. In the last decade, I benefited significantly from my work at Tel Megiddo. Although situated outside of the research area, the time in the field and the lab helped me to shape my understanding of the material culture of northern Israel in a considerable way. Apart from the people already mentioned above, I would like to thank Dr. Matthew J. Adams, Dr. Margaret C. Cohen (W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research), Dr. Melissa Cradic

(University of Pennsylvania), Dr. Robert S. Homsher (University College London), Ms. Yana Kirilov, Dr. Mario A.S. Martin, and Ms. Na'ama Walzer (Tel Aviv University).

Financial support for the research was provided by the project, "The History of the Pentateuch: Combining Literary and Archaeological Approaches," funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Sinergia project CRSII1 160785/1). The project was directed by Konrad Schmid (University Zurich), Christophe Nihan, and Thomas Römer (University of Lausanne), and Israel Finkelstein and Oded Lipschits (Tel Aviv University). Additional funding was provided by a stipend from the School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology and the Minerva Stiftung, which generously supported my stay at Leipzig University. Special thanks go to Ms. Julia Lechler for helping with many administrative issues.

Finally, my most sincere thanks go to Sabine and Irmi, my beloved wife and daughter, *meine Liebe des Lebens*, without whom not a single word would have been written. Both made the present enjoyable and at least as mysterious as the past.

Assaf Kleiman
Tübingen, April 2022

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1. Introduction

At the end of the second millennium BCE, far-reaching changes occurred in the cultural and political landscapes of the Levant. After several centuries of Hittite and Egyptian imperial domination, clan leaders expanded their political control far beyond the immediate vicinity of their hometowns, gradually creating large-scale entities often described in research as the territorial kingdoms of the Iron Age.¹ Historical sources, especially those from Syria and Anatolia, inform us that some of these rulers were descendants of royal families who survived the crisis at the end of the Late Bronze Age, while other kingdoms and royal dynasties were seemingly new on the stage of history.² Most of them maintained their political independence for several centuries until the Neo-Assyrian Empire completed its expansion to the west in the 8th–7th centuries BCE.

From a long-term perspective, the territorial kingdoms, especially those of the southern Levant, had a lasting impact on the culture and history of the Ancient Near East. In less than three centuries, they established relatively stable royal dynasties, initiated building projects, including sophisticated architecture and monumental art, constructed administrative centers and harbors, and even participated in long-distance trade of raw materials and prestige objects.³ However, the cultural and economic prosperity of the territorial kingdoms also led to competition and rivalry. Military conflicts between neighboring polities were common and usually related to disputes over lands located at the edge of their political control.⁴ At other times, primarily as the military pressure of the Assyrians increased, cross-regional coalitions were formed, although participation in these alliances was not always voluntary.⁵ It was after nearly two centuries of more or less independent existence that the new policy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire led to the

¹ The political history of the territorial kingdoms has been discussed extensively. For studies that deal with the Neo-Hittite/Aramean kingdoms of Syria and Anatolia, see Sader 1987; idem 2014a; Lipiński 2000; Younger 2016; Osborne 2021; for the Kingdom of Israel, see Finkelstein 1999a; idem 2013. Note that I refrain from using the term “state” in relation to the Levantine Iron Age kingdoms in order to differentiate them from the concept of “nation-states” of the modern era (Pfoh 2008, 111–112).

² For studies that discuss the end of the Bronze Age, see Ward/Joukowsky 1992; Cline 2014; Millek 2020; Knapp 2021 with a recent review of the literature. For the political continuity in the northern Levant in the early stages of the Iron Age, see Bryce 2012, 83–98; Weeden 2013, 6–10.

³ In recent years, there has been a widespread agreement that copper was one of the most important raw materials originating in the Levant during the Iron Age. For the excavations carried out at the copper production sites in the Aravah Valley, see Levy/Najjar/Ben-Yosef 2014; Ben-Yosef 2016.

⁴ Na’aman 1997, 125–126; Sader 2014a, 26; Sergi/de Hulster 2016.

⁵ On forced participation in local alliances in the Ancient Near East, see Na’aman 1991.

collapse of many of the territorial kingdoms⁶ and thus also to the conclusion of an important chapter in the history of the Levant.

In this book, I discuss the archaeology and history of the Iron Age communities located in the territories between the core regions of Israel and Aram-Damascus, two of the most influential kingdoms that emerged across the Levant (Figure 1). While the names of most of these communities remain unknown, a bottom-up approach to their settlement history and material culture reveals a distinct narrative that only at times intersected with the story of Israel and Aram-Damascus.⁷ It produces, thus, a more complex understanding of the historical upheavals and power relations in the central Levant.

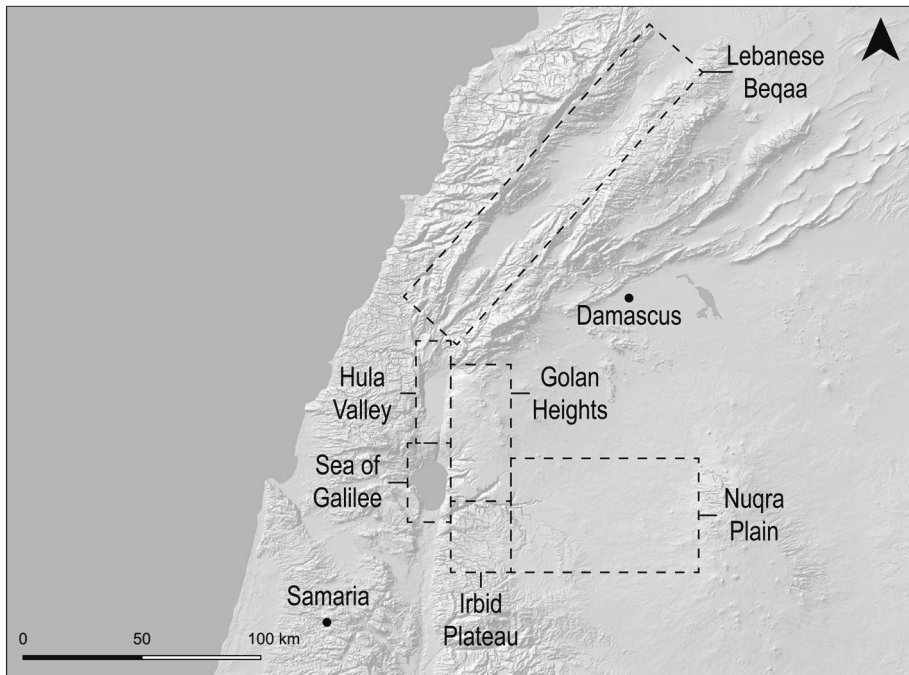


Figure 1: The central Levant with regions included in this study marked in dashed line (created with QGIS 3.16 and World Shaded Relief of Esri 2014)

⁶ For overviews of the Assyrian policy in the west, see Berlejung 2012; Aster/Faust 2018.

⁷ In the last years, it became evident that the attempts to reconstruct large-scale identities based on material culture (e.g., “Israelites” or “Aramaean”) ultimately lead to dead ends and generate frustration (see especially Bonatz 2019 in relation to the so-called material culture of the Aramaeans; see also Frevel 2018a, 217). Against this background, A.M. Maeir (2021, 143) has recently suggested abandoning what he calls “grand narratives” in favor of bottom-up archaeological reconstructions.

1.1 On the Formation of the Territorial Kingdoms

Conventionally, the formation of territorial kingdoms in the Levant has been understood in neo-evolutionary terms as the development of rural kin-based populations into urban societies, which together formed a highly centralized political entity.⁸ Some scholars emphasized the role of environmental conditions, while others highlighted the ethnic or social ties of the local populations,⁹ but the basic theory remained the same.

In the last few decades, the traditional approaches to Ancient Near East state-formation processes have been challenged. It has been argued that ancient polities, the Iron Age kingdoms of the Levant among them, should not be viewed as a reflection of modern national states but rather be understood in social terms that fit past societies.¹⁰ Following Max Weber, several scholars proposed that the social and political structures of Ancient Near Eastern societies were always kin-based and that the understanding of authority did not depend on their socio-economic mode.¹¹ Others, who discussed the nature of the relationship between rulers and the populations living in their domain, argue that the political hierarchy in ancient kingdoms should be seen as patronage relations.¹² According to this view, the king, who stood at the top of the political hierarchy, and various local clan leaders were bonded in a patron-client relationship that imposed reciprocity on both sides, usually in the form of political or economic exchange.¹³

All of these new concepts, well-received and gradually adopted by many historians and archaeologists,¹⁴ force us to rethink the formation of Israel and Aram-Damascus, and particularly, the meaning of the territorial expansion of these kingdoms into the central Levant. The Israelite and Damascene monarchs apparently established their authority over this region by forming (or enforcing) alliances with numerous clan leaders with whom they did not necessarily have previous contacts.¹⁵ With these thoughts in mind, it is apparent why the history and archaeology of the Iron Age communities in the

⁸ For the history of the conventional paradigm, see Master 2001, 123–128; more broadly, Van Valkenburgh/Osborne 2013, 3–7. See also Osborne 2021, 9–11.

⁹ E.g., Finkelstein 1988; Knauf 1992; Joffe 2002; Faust 2006.

¹⁰ Stager 1985, 25; idem 2003; Master 2001; Schloen 2001; most recently, Thomas 2021.

¹¹ Master 2001, 128–130; Schloen 2001, *passim*.

¹² E.g., Pfoh 2009; Sergi/de Hulster 2016. Based on an analysis of the Mesha Stele, it has been argued that the entities involved usually formed from the integration of earlier and smaller in size political associations (Routledge 1997; idem 2004; see also Sergi/de Hulster 2016, 2).

¹³ Niemann 2008; Nam 2012 (both based on the Samaria Ostraca). See also Master 2014, 83–85.

¹⁴ In light of these new advances, A.M. Maeir and I. Shai (2016) argued that the Kingdom of Judah was established on alliances between the royal dynasty in Jerusalem and strong clans in the south, including ones that formerly prospered under Philistine Gath's shadow (see also Shai/Maeir 2018 with some updates). For a similar argument regarding the Kingdom of Geshur, see Sergi/Kleiman 2018.

¹⁵ A particularly relevant historical example of such a process is the case of Dahir al-'Umar, a local leader that was active in the Lower Galilee in the late 17th and 18th centuries CE. At that time, the imperial control of the Ottoman Empire over Palestine weakened, and through a series of alliances with local tribes, he succeeded in imposing his political authority over the Galilee, the coast, and even parts of the highlands (Niemann 1997, 265–267; Joudah 1987). For similar case studies from the Ottoman period, see Marfoe 1979a, 25 (on the rise of Fakhār ed-Dīn II); Arie 2011, 71–72 (on the rise of Aqil Agha); Thareani 2019a, 193–196 (on the rise of the el-Fa'our family).

central Levant should not be reconstructed through the lens of the elite groups who subjugated them, i.e., the Hebrew Bible, but rather on finds from the central Levant itself.

1.2 In the Shadow of the Deuteronomistic History

The Hebrew Bible, and more specifically, the parts associated by scholars with the Deuteronomistic History, had and still has an overwhelming lingering influence on the interpretation of the history and archaeology of Iron Age communities in the central Levant. By adhering to the biblical narratives, it has often been assumed that at the end of the second millennium BCE, territories such as the Hula Valley and Golan Heights were repopulated by foreign people, sometimes designated Proto-Israelites.¹⁶ As the Hebrew Bible mentions the presence of Canaanite populations in the central Levant, as well as local allegedly Aramaean kingdoms (e.g., Jos 13:13), scholars have been forced to acknowledge the existence of local enclaves in this region. However, they have downplayed their socio-cultural and political impact to the minimum.¹⁷ It is also frequently assumed that with the establishment of David and Solomon's United Monarchy, the settled populations, who until then lived in kin-based rural settlements, underwent rapid urbanization and constructed elaborate cities and cultic centers. And for the most part, these settlements developed without much disturbance until the late 8th century BCE.

Fieldwork carried out at prominent sites in the central Levant, especially Tel Hazor and Tel Dan, revealed detailed stratigraphic sequences and many finds,¹⁸ generally interpreted to line up with the main stages in the biblical history of Ancient Israel. First, the decline of the Canaanite city-states in the 13th century BCE and the destruction of Stratum XIII at Tel Hazor were correlated to the conquest narrative (e.g., Jos 11). Second, the appearance of many rural settlements in the 12th–11th centuries BCE and the so-called Israelite material culture in some sites (e.g., Strata VI–IVB at Tel Dan and Strata XII–XI at Tel Hazor) was evidence of the settlement of the tribes (e.g., Judg 18). Third, monumental architecture at Tel Hazor (Strata X–IX) represented the establishment of David and Solomon's kingdom (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:15) and the development of the northern cities (e.g., Strata VIII–V at Tel Hazor or Strata IVA–II at Tel Dan) reflected the prosperity of the Northern Kingdom in the 9th–8th centuries BCE (e.g., 2 Kgs 14:25). Fourth, the destruction of northern cities (e.g., Stratum V at Tel Hazor and Stratum II at Tel Dan) was correlated to the Assyrian conquests of 732 BCE (e.g., 2 Kgs 15:29).

Biblical scholars today agree that most of the relevant biblical accounts, specifically those originating from the Deuteronomistic school, were committed to writing many years after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (and sometimes even centuries after the

¹⁶ Dever 2003, 194–200. For problems with the term Proto-Israelites, see Kletter 2006.

¹⁷ E.g., Mazar *et al.* 1964; Kochavi 1989; Lemaire 2019, 249–250.

¹⁸ For the most up-to-date information regarding the Iron Age at Hazor, see Ben-Tor/Ben-Ami/Sandhaus 2012; Ben-Tor 2016, 118–166. The Iron Age I finds revealed in the old excavations at Tel Dan were recently published (Ilan 2019a), and the Iron Age II remains are currently being prepared for final publication by Y. Thareani (for preliminary reports on the finds, see *idem* 2016a; *idem* 2016b).

periods they allegedly described).¹⁹ Consequently, these texts reflect a combination of the theological ideology of the authors and the historical reality of their days and not of earlier periods. Moreover, the authors never intended to write a political history of Israel and Judah in the modern sense, nor did they plan to sketch a social history of Canaan or systematically describe the different identities that existed in the region or beyond (and this is without even delving into the hermeneutical issues relating to the meaning of identity in ancient societies).²⁰ The biblical authors selectively reworked ancient sources that were available to them in order to promote their theological ideas. Detailed descriptions of non-Judahite identities (and histories) were, therefore, of little importance to the authors, especially groups that prospered many years before their time or those located far to the north, on which they knew very little.²¹

Archaeological research has also contributed significantly to the collapse of this conventional paradigm. Most scholars agree that the Late Bronze Age city-states declined over several decades²² and especially that this process was a broad Eastern Mediterranean phenomenon.²³ The appearance of the new villages in the central hill country and beyond is regarded nowadays as the result of a complex and cyclical set of socio-economic processes resulting in the archaeological visibility of local groups already there (and such developments were neither unique to the highlands nor to the Iron Age I).²⁴ Changes in the absolute dates of Iron Age ceramic horizons, many of which are enjoying widespread consensus, called for parting from the traditional interpretation of David and Solomon's kingdom, leaving little material evidence supporting a large-scale polity centered in Jerusalem.²⁵ Nothing in the excavations carried out in the city or its countryside justify the reconstruction of the early monarchy as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶ Even the impressive finds from Samaria, which by far surpass those found in the extensively-excavated Jerusalem, do not facilitate the reconstruction of a large-scale entity without

¹⁹ E.g., Na'aman 1994; idem 2007, 387–388; Finkelstein/Silberman 2002; Mazar 2014, 347–349.

²⁰ Maeir 2019; idem 2021 with detailed discussion and updated literature.

²¹ Na'aman 2002a; idem 2016a, 131.

²² E.g., Finkelstein 1988, 295–302; Dever 2003, 37–74; Faust 2006, 176; Mazar 2014, 349.

²³ Ward/Joukowsky 1992; Cline 2014; Knapp 2021 with an extensive list of earlier studies.

²⁴ Finkelstein 1988. For a similar phenomenon in the northern Levant, see Schwartz 1989. Recently, Y. Gadot (2017) proposed that the settlement of rural settlements in the highlands could also be linked to the expansion of the urban sector of the Iron Age cities (e.g., the city-state of Shechem).

²⁵ E.g., Wightman 1990; Finkelstein 2010a; idem 2019; Herzog/Singer-Avitz 2004. For other viewpoints on Jerusalem (and its monuments) in the 10th century BCE, see Sergi 2017; Mazar 2020a.

²⁶ Herzog/Singer-Avitz 2004; Lehmann 2004; Finkelstein 2011a; Maeir 2012; Sergi 2013; Na'aman 2013; Lehmann/Niemann 2014; and see, in particular, Gadot/Uziel 2017 for the few pre-late 8th century BCE monuments that were found in the city. In the past few years, several archaeologists working in lowland sites (Beth-Shemesh, Khirbet Qeiyafa, and Tel 'Eitun) argued that there is sufficient evidence for reconstructing a large-scale kingdom centered in Jerusalem as early as the 10th century BCE (Bunimovitz/Lederman 2001; Garfinkel *et al.* 2016; Faust/Sapir 2018). However, the dating of some of the finds to the 10th century BCE (e.g., Building 101 at Tel 'Eitun) is highly problematic (Shai/Maeir 2018, n. 6; Finkelstein 2020). In other cases, with more secure dating (e.g., Khirbet Qeiyafa), the connection of the finds to the highlands, rather than to a local polity, is unproven (Na'aman 2010a; idem 2017a; Koch 2012, 54–56; idem 2021, n. 10; Lehmann/Niemann 2014, 86; Niemann 2017; for the alternative reconstructions, see Garfinkel *et al.* 2016; Fantalkin/Finkelstein 2017; Faust 2020).

the evidence from the lowlands (e.g., Tel Hazor, Tel Megiddo, and Tel Gezer).²⁷ After all, it is the political influence and impact over territories located beyond its immediate vicinity that differentiate a territorial kingdom from a city-state.²⁸

Altogether, a reconstruction of the settlement history of Iron Age communities in the central Levant based solely on biblical evidence is methodologically unsound and, in essence, subjugates the local narratives to those of the ruling elites. Here, I intended to reproduce a narrative based on the material remains found in those communities while not ignoring the historical fact that for an extended period, they were indeed ruled by the elites who emerged in the Samaria Highlands and the Damascus Oasis. While it is clear that the interpretation of the archaeological record is not problem-free,²⁹ it still provides discrete evidence collected from the investigated societies themselves.

1.3 Between Israel and Aram-Damascus

Biblical and extra-biblical texts suggest that Israel and Aram-Damascus competed over the political control of the territories and communities located between them for most of their existence. Interpreting these textual sources is not always easy, especially in the case of biblical narratives that allegedly describe 10th and early 9th centuries BCE realities. Nevertheless, from the mid-9th century BCE, there is more or less a consensus among scholars on the sequences of events and the frequent changes in the power balance between the two kingdoms (Figure 2).³⁰

1.3.1 *The 10th Century BCE*

Biblical references to early events in the history of Israel and Aram-Damascus are surprisingly plentiful, especially compared to the limited information on the first half of the 8th century BCE.³¹ Having said that, most scholars also agree that these accounts are colored by the ideologies of the biblical authors in the late monarchic period, as well as conflated by the passage of many generations before they were written, as mainly expressed in the depiction of David and Solomon's kingdom. Consequently, the historical reliability and chronological setting of nearly every event that refers to the time before the mid-9th century BCE have been questioned and depend entirely on one's approach to the biblical materials. Scholars who support the existence of a large-scale territorial entity ruled from Jerusalem in the early 10th century BCE usually accept the description of David's wars against the kingdoms of Beth-Rehob and Aram-Damascus (2 Sam 8:3;

²⁷ On the excavations, see Tappy 1992; Franklin 2004; Finkelstein 2011b; Sergi/Gadot 2017.

²⁸ For a comparison between the case of Labayu, almost certainly the ruler of Shechem in the 14th century BCE, and the territorial expansion of the Northern Kingdom, see Finkelstein/Na'aman 2005.

²⁹ Na'aman 2010b, and especially, Pioske 2019 with detailed discussion.

³⁰ The literature on the relations between Israel and Aram, especially during Hazael's reign, is particularly extensive. For historical reevaluations from the last decades, see Pitard 1987; Lemaire 1991; idem 2019; Lipiński 2000, 367–470; Hafthorsson 2006; Niehr 2011; Hasegawa 2012; Ghantous 2013; Berlejung 2014; Younger 2016, 564–652; Frevel 2018, 213–221; idem 2019a; Zwickel 2019.

³¹ See summaries in Hafthorsson 2006, 137–184; Lemaire 2019; Zwickel 2019.

1 Kgs 11:23–24) as reflecting historical reality, and only minor details in some of the narratives are questioned.³² According to this line of interpretation, more clues for the United Monarchy's territorial extent during the 10th century BCE can be gleaned from the following accounts: 1) David's marriage to the daughter of the king of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3), 2) the list of the cities built by Solomon (1 Kgs 9:15), and 3) the description of Sheba's revolt and his flight to Abel Beth-Maacah (2 Sam 20). Based on these sources, it has been assumed that in the 10th century BCE, the Hula Valley and nearby regions were included within the extent of the United Monarchy and that these territories were inherited by the north-Israelite kings (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 12:26–33; 1 Kgs 15:20).³³

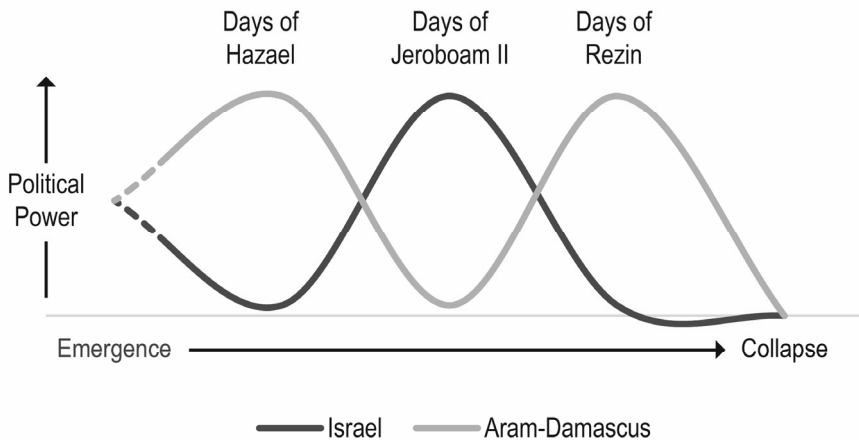


Figure 2: Schematic illustration of the shifting power balance between Israel and Aram

An utterly different picture is drawn by scholars who do not accept the historicity of the United Monarchy and question the reliability of at least some of the events associated with the 10th and early 9th centuries BCE.³⁴ I. Finkelstein, for instance, has contested the traditional view presented above in a series of articles and books, arguing that the Northern Kingdom expanded its political influence to the far north only after the rise of the Omride Dynasty in Samaria.³⁵ Furthermore, he asserted that these regions were previously ruled by local city-states, similar to those encountered in the Jezreel Valley (e.g., Stratum VIA at Megiddo or Stratum XVII at Tel Yoqne'am).³⁶ In addition, most of the critical scholars dismiss today the accounts of 1 Kgs 12:26–33 (the construction of the

³² Younger 2016, 565–571; Lemaire 2019, 246–250; Zwickel 2019, 272–274.

³³ See, e.g., Ben-Tor 2000, 11; Lipiński 2000, 372; Hafthorsson 2006, 143–144; Younger 2016, 571–580; Lemaire 2019, 250–251; Zwickel 2019, 274–275; Yahalom-Mack *et al.* 2021.

³⁴ See, e.g., Finkelstein 2011c; idem 2013; idem 2016a; Na'aman 2002b; idem 2007; idem 2012; idem 2017b; Arie 2008; Hasegawa 2012; Berlejung 2009; idem 2014; Sergi 2015, 60–62.

³⁵ Finkelstein 2011c, 230–231; idem 2013, 74–76; idem 2016a. See also Arie 2008.

³⁶ Finkelstein 1999b, 59–60; idem 2017 (see also Kleiman 2019a; idem 2019b). For a comprehensive discussion of the archaeology and history of the Jezreel Valley in the Iron Age I, see Arie 2011.

cult centers in Bethel and Dan) and 1 Kgs 15:20 (Ben-Hadad I's campaign) as reliable sources for reconstructing events in the late 10th/early 9th centuries BCE.³⁷

1.3.2 The Early 9th Century BCE

As already stated above, more agreement exists in regard to the reliability of events that occurred in the first half of the 9th century BCE, many of which are also mentioned in extra-biblical sources. For instance, there is a wide consensus that the military campaigns of the Assyrians to the west in the days of Shalmaneser III forced some cooperation between the local kingdoms. The Kurkh Monolith particularly provides a unique snapshot of these local alliances, revealing, *inter alia*, an interesting collaboration between Israel and Aram-Damascus.³⁸ Both kingdoms fought side by side against the Assyrians in the Orontes Valley in 853 BCE. However, the cooperation between them did not last long. A decade later, around 842/841 BCE, Joram and Ahaziah attacked Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kgs 22), a Damascene stronghold in the Irbid Plateau.³⁹ From a historical perspective, the battle was disastrous for the Israelite monarchy. Besides the probable death of Joram and Ahaziah,⁴⁰ the remaining heirs of the Omride Dynasty fell victim to a rebellion led by Jehu (2 Kgs 9), a military official and a member of an influential clan named Nimshi, which most likely resided in the Beth-Shean Valley.⁴¹

³⁷ Note that while the construction of the cult centers in Bethel and Dan by Jeroboam I can hardly be taken as representing 10th century BCE reality (for the biblical materials, see Berlejung 2009; for the archaeological remains from Tel Dan and Bethel, see Arie 2008; Finkelstein/Singer-Avitz 2009, respectively), the description of the cities conquered by Ben-Hadad I (1 Kgs 15:20) could be understood as an older, fragmentary source that was compiled using later materials, such as the list of towns conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III in 2 Kgs 15:29 (Na'aman 2007, 406; Sergi 2015, 60–62).

³⁸ Grayson 1996, 11, 24. This alliance must have been a temporary arrangement, as in the following years, the Northern Kingdom did not fight against the Assyrians (Lipiński 1977, 273–274).

³⁹ During the 838/837 BCE military campaigns of the Assyrians against Aram-Damascus, Israel's northeastern border was located to the west of the Hauran (and probably also to the west of the Jordan River as was the case in the late 8th century BCE). In the royal annals of Shalmaneser III, he mentions two main Damascene cities in addition to the capital: Danabu and Malaha (Grayson 1996, 79; Yamada 2000, 205–209). The exact location of these cities is disputed, but most scholars place them in the Nuqra Plain, east of the Ruqqad River (for discussions, see Lipiński 2000, 350–354; Hasegawa 2012, 55–58; Na'aman 2012, 92–93; Younger 2016, 558–564; Lemaire 2019, 255; Zwickel 2019, 277–278). As of today, the easternmost identification for Malaha is in Malah es-Sarrar, a small village in the eastern part of Jabal ed-Druz (Sader 1987, 266). No mound was reported in the village itself, but scholars, who visited the Hauran at the beginning of the 20th century CE, mentioned that about 1.6 km to the northeast, there is a 60 m high hill with ancient architectural remains that is called Tell el-Mujedda (Butler/Norris/Stoeber 1930, 29). Another archaeological site in the vicinity of Malah es-Sarrar exists *ca.* 7 km to the north of the village and is called Hebike. It was surveyed by F. Braemer (1993, 144), who reported the existence of Iron Age sherds and a 'cyclopean' wall which he dates to the Middle Bronze Age. Danabu should most likely be identified with Tell ed-Dunayba near Izraa (e.g., Lemaire 2019, 255) or with Tell ed-Dabba, *ca.* 30 km to the east (e.g., Rohmer 2020, 235).

⁴⁰ Lipiński 1977, 274–275; Na'aman 2000, 104; Sergi 2016 with earlier references.

⁴¹ For a reevaluation of the relations between Israel and Aram during the time of the Nimshide kings, see Hasegawa 2012. For the possible background of Jehu, see Mazar 2016, 110. Interestingly, the events associated with this *coup d'état* seem to be remembered in the north for many years (Hos 1:4).

1.3.3 The Late 9th Century BCE

The dominance of Aram-Damascus in the second half of the 9th century BCE, during the reign of Hazael, is attested by many biblical and extra-biblical sources (especially the Tel Dan Stele, but also by Hazael's Booty Inscriptions) and is accepted by many scholars.⁴² During the years, scholars even characterized Aram-Damascus of Hazael's reign as a mini-empire, a description that may be justified bearing in mind the inconsistent use of the term in the current historical and archaeological literature.⁴³ References to the political supremacy of Aram-Damascus during the reign of Hazael are also common in the biblical sources (e.g., 2 Kgs 12:18; 13:3, 22; Amos 1:3; 6:2). All of this means that during most of the reigns of Jehu and Jehoahaz, the political control of Israel was perhaps limited to the Samaria Highlands and its immediate vicinity.

1.3.4 The 8th Century BCE

Our historical information regarding the relations between Israel and Aram-Damascus in the 8th century BCE is surprisingly low.⁴⁴ However, it is clear that the superiority of Aram-Damascus obviously did not last long, and towards the end of the 9th century BCE, the Kingdom of Israel struck back, probably exploiting Hazael's death (*ca.* 805) and the renewal of the military campaigns of the Assyrians to the west in the days of Adad-Nirari III (810–783 BCE).⁴⁵ If the biblical accounts of Israel's territorial expansion into the Lebanese Beqaa in the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kgs 14:25) and the Transjordan (Amos

⁴² Pitard 1987, 145–159; Na'aman 1997; Hafthorsson 2006; Niehr 2011; Hasegawa 2012, 52–83, 105; Finkelstein 2013, 119–128; Ghantous 2013; Younger 2016, 591–630; Frevel 2018a, 220–221.

⁴³ E.g., Mazar 1962; Younger 2016, 591–632, and see detailed discussion in Frevel 2018b. Archaeologically speaking, the evidence for Hazael's expansion to the northern Levant remains unclear. Destruction layers dating to the Iron Age IIA have not been detected in mounds located in Syria or south-eastern Turkey. At most of the local settlements (e.g., the Hama Citadel, Tell Qarqur, and Tell Afis), the timeframe of the 9th–8th centuries BCE is understood as an uninterrupted sequence, with an apparent traumatic event occurring only with the Assyrian campaigns to the west in the 8th century BCE; this is probably one of the reasons for the difficulties in determining the ceramic profile of the Iron IIA in inland Syria (Mazzoni 2014, 694–697). Of course, relying too much on negative evidence is always risky, especially when dealing with the fragmentary nature of many of the Iron Age remains exposed in the northern Levant. However, the fact that events dated to the Iron Age IIB have been found (e.g., Period E1 at Hama Citadel) should facilitate a case against assumed and undetected Iron Age IIA destructions. Our knowledge regarding the involvement of Aram-Damascus in the Lebanese Beqaa in the 10th and 9th centuries BCE is similarly limited, but there are still some clues. N. Na'aman (1995a, 388–390; see also Ghantous 2013) proposed that the 'mq mentioned in Hazael's Booty Inscriptions alludes to the Lebanese Beqaa, known in the Late Bronze Age as the Land of 'Amqi (Aharoni 1953; Na'aman 1999; Rainey 2015, 21–22) and that Hazael's hometown was in this area. If Na'aman's proposal is correct, then there are good reasons to assume that this region was also controlled by Aram-Damascus, at least in the 9th century BCE (but for an alternative view, see Younger 2016, 602, n. 193).

⁴⁴ Only a few bits of historical information illuminate the days of Jeroboam II (Finkelstein/Schmid 2017 with additional articles in the same issue; see also Na'aman 2019), and nearly nothing is known about the reign of Hadyan of Damascus (Grayson 1996, 239–240; Younger 2016, 356, 640–642).

⁴⁵ For a historical reevaluation of Adad-Nirari III's reign, see Siddall 2013. Note that Joash is mentioned among the kings that paid tribute to the Assyrians (Grayson 1996, 209–212).

6:13–14) are accurate, then in the early 8th century BCE, the southwestern border of Aram-Damascus was pushed back to the Laja, or even to the Damascus Oasis.⁴⁶

But a few decades later, around the mid-8th century BCE, the political balance shifted once again. Biblical and extra-biblical sources inform us that during the reign of Rezin (*ca.* 738–732 BCE), the last king of Aram-Damascus, the borders of the Aramaean kingdom expanded at the expense of its southern neighbor. Details on this period derive from short remarks in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 15:36; 16:1–6; Isa 7:1). These comments indicate the superiority of Aram-Damascus over Israel (and Judah) at that time. Lastly, additional data on the relations between the two kingdoms are supplied by two summary inscriptions from the time of Tiglath-Pileser III, which delineate the border between Aram-Damascus and Israel along the Jordan River.⁴⁷ These inscriptions indicate that Aram-Damascus's political control reached Abel Shittim, at that time, a town located in the Jordan Valley (possibly to be located in Tell el-Kefrein or Tell el-Hammam).⁴⁸

1.3.5 *The Contribution of the Archaeological Research*

Archaeology has played only a minor role in the reconstruction of the history of the relations between Israel and Aram-Damascus and, in general, in determining the role played by the local populations of the central Levant. In most cases, the data from the field were brought in to support or reject the identification of ancient sites or to reinforce some aspects of the texts.⁴⁹ More recent works have indeed attempted to integrate the material evidence into historical reconstructions in a more comprehensive fashion, although usually, this remains secondary to the texts.⁵⁰ Only in three cases has archaeological research played a major role: 1) the attribution of Iron Age IIA destructions to the military campaigns of Aram-Damascus against Israel⁵¹ and nearby polities,⁵² 2) the correlation of the settlement system emerged around the Sea of Galilee with a small Aramaean polity known in the biblical sources as Geshur,⁵³ and 3) the association of the construction of two royal cities in the Hula Valley, Tel Dan and Tel Hazor, with Aram-Damascus.⁵⁴ While these suggestions have gained much support in research, many scholars have also argued against their viability and suggested more conventional interpretations.⁵⁵ Accordingly, one of the goals of the current study is also to re-evaluate these issues, especially those pertaining to Iron Age communities in the central Levant.

⁴⁶ For the possibility that some of David's wars against the Arameans reflect the territorial expansion of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam II, see Na'aman 2017b, 313–315.

⁴⁷ Na'aman 1995b; Tadmor/Yamada 2011, 105–107 (for H. Tadmor's old view, see *idem* 1962).

⁴⁸ For the identification of Abel Shittim, see Finkelstein/Koch/Lipschits 2012, 138.

⁴⁹ E.g., Mazar 1962; Pitard 1987, n. 79.

⁵⁰ Lipiński 2000, 347–407; Hasegawa 2012, 65–68; Ghantous 2013, 16–17.

⁵¹ Na'aman 1997, 126–127; Finkelstein 2009, 118, 121–122; Kleiman 2016.

⁵² Maeir 2012, 26–49 (for Tell es-Safi/Gath); Lehmann 2019 (for other settlements in the south).

⁵³ Kochavi 1989; Na'aman 2012; Arav 2013; Sergi/Kleiman 2018.

⁵⁴ Finkelstein 1999b; Lipiński 2000, 351; Arie 2008, 36–37.

⁵⁵ E.g., Herr 2013, 240; Zwickel 2019, 278 (on the attribution of the destruction of Philistine Gath to Hazael of Damascus); Ben-Tor 2000 (on the association of Stratum VIII at Tel Hazor with the Aramaeans); Thareani 2016a; *idem* 2019a; *idem* 2019b (on the dating of Stratum IVA at Tel Dan); Pakkala 2010; *idem* 2013 (on the identification of the Kingdom of Geshur in the archaeological record).

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