

# The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II

AVRAHAM FAUST

*Translated by*  
RUTH LUDLUM

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*In memory of my grandfather  
Josef Zvi Wallersteiner  
who loved the land and the book*



# Contents

List of Illustrations . . . . .	xi
Preface and Acknowledgments . . . . .	xiii
Abbreviations . . . . .	xvii
Introduction . . . . .	1
The Place of this Book in Research . . . . .	1
The Period under Discussion . . . . .	3
The Book's Structure . . . . .	4
<b>1. Historical Inquiry on Israelite Society:</b>	
Summary of Previous Research . . . . .	7
A Few Preliminary Notes . . . . .	7
Traditional Social Organization. . . . .	8
Social Organization at the End of the Monarchy. . . . .	14
Processes of Change in Israelite Society . . . . .	18
Did Changes Occur in the Transition from Settlement to Monarchy? An Alternative View . . . . .	24
Summary. . . . .	27
<b>2. History of Archaeological Study on Israelite Society . . . . .</b>	<b>28</b>
General Studies . . . . .	28
Economic Specialization . . . . .	31
Socioeconomic Stratification . . . . .	31
Analysis of Residential Houses and Family Structure. . . . .	34
Detailed Analyses of Specific Settlements. . . . .	35
Between the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E. . . . .	36
Summary. . . . .	37
<b>3. Between Monarchy and Kinship: Urban Society . . . . .</b>	<b>39</b>
Definitions and Methodology. . . . .	39
The Sites: The Cities of the Kingdom of Israel . . . . .	46
Cities of the Kingdom of Judah in the Eighth Century B.C.E. . . . .	68
Cities of the Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century B.C.E. . . . .	95
Discussion: Public Buildings . . . . .	99

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The City Gate as an Urban Community Element . . . . .	100
Urban Planning . . . . .	109
Conclusions . . . . .	110
Appendix: Small Finds and Social Stratification . . . . .	117
<b>4. Community and Family: Rural Society . . . . .</b>	<b>128</b>
Definitions and Methodology . . . . .	128
Villages. . . . .	130
Fortress Villages. . . . .	143
Large Villages or Townships . . . . .	145
Farms . . . . .	148
Discussion: Social and Community Organization in the Israelite Village. . . . .	159
Conclusions . . . . .	170
<b>5. Fortified Structures in the Countryside:</b>	
Between the Military and the Administration . . . . .	178
"Real Fortresses" . . . . .	178
Fortified Structures in the Rural Areas of the Kingdom of Judah . . . . .	183
The Function of the Fortified Structures and the Settlements below Them . . . . .	185
Discussion . . . . .	187
Summary. . . . .	188
<b>6. Political Organization in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. . . . .</b>	<b>190</b>
Archaeological Evidence for the Existence of a State:	
General Characteristics. . . . .	190
Israel and Judah. . . . .	196
Summary. . . . .	206
Appendix: Residential Buildings in Iron Age II . . . . .	207
<b>7. The Four-Room House and Israelite Society. . . . .</b>	<b>213</b>
The Essence of the Four-Room House. . . . .	216
Social and Cognitive Aspects of Four-Room Houses . . . . .	219
Summary. . . . .	227
<b>8. Pots and Peoples: Ethnic Groups in the Kingdom of Israel. . . . .</b>	<b>230</b>
Archaeology and Ethnicity . . . . .	230
The Rural Sites in the Northern Valleys. . . . .	234
Analysis: The Unique Features of the Sites . . . . .	239
Ethnic Groups in the Northern Valleys . . . . .	248
Summary. . . . .	252

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9. From Hamlets to Monarchy: Israelite Society from the Settlement Period to the End of the Period of the Monarchy . . . . .	255
The Settlement Period . . . . .	255
The Period of the Monarchy . . . . .	258
Summary . . . . .	268
Epilogue . . . . .	269
The Status of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah . . . . .	269
The Question of Social Stratification . . . . .	270
City and Country . . . . .	271
Social Identity . . . . .	271
Directions for Continuing a Socioarchaeological Study of the Period of the Monarchy . . . . .	272
Bibliography . . . . .	275
Indexes . . . . .	319
Index of Authors . . . . .	319
Index of Scripture . . . . .	325
Index of Sites . . . . .	326





# List of Illustrations

## Maps

Map 1. Map of the urban sites discussed in chap. 3 . . . . .	40
Map 2. Map showing the rural sites discussed in chap. 4. . . . .	131
Map 3. Map showing the forts discussed in chap. 5. . . . .	179

## Graphs

Graph 1. Graph showing an equal distribution of wealth . . . . .	43
Graph 2. Graph showing an unequal distribution of wealth . . . . .	43
Graph 3. Hazor: size of buildings. . . . .	55
Graph 4. Hazor: weighted graph . . . . .	55
Graph 5. Tirzah: size of buildings. . . . .	62
Graph 6. Tirzah: weighted graph. . . . .	62
Graph 7. Mizpah: size of buildings. . . . .	76
Graph 8. Mizpah: weighted graph. . . . .	76
Graph 9. Tell Beit Mirsim: size of buildings. . . . .	83
Graph 10. Tell Beit Mirsim: weighted graph. . . . .	83
Graph 11. Beersheba: size of buildings. . . . .	91
Graph 12. Beersheba: weighted graph. . . . .	91
Graph 13. Kh. Jemein: size of buildings. . . . .	138
Graph 14. Kh. Jemein: weighted graph. . . . .	138
Graph 15. Beit Aryeh: size of buildings. . . . .	141
Graph 16. Beit Aryeh: weighted graph. . . . .	141
Graph 17. The Kingdom of Judah: differences in the quality of buildings. . . . .	197
Graph 18. The Kingdom of Israel: differences in the quality of buildings. . . . .	197
Graph 19. The Kingdom of Israel: settlement hierarchy . . . . .	204
Graph 20. The Kingdom of Judah: settlement hierarchy . . . . .	204
Graph 21. Settlement hierarchy in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. . . . .	205
Graph 22. Rural settlement in the hill country and the Beersheba Valley in the Iron Age—schematic chronological chart of select (excavated) sites. . . . .	257

## Figures

Fig. 1. Samaria: the royal compound . . . . .	47
Fig. 2. Hazor: the structure at Area G . . . . .	48
Fig. 3. Hazor: a residential neighborhood in area A . . . . .	49
Fig. 4. Hazor: two four-room structures in area B . . . . .	50
Fig. 5. Hazor: the structure in area L. . . . .	50
Fig. 6. Kinrot: general plan of the Iron II city . . . . .	56
Fig. 7. Kinrot: a stratum II dwelling . . . . .	57

Fig. 8. Kinrot: stratum I dwellings . . . . .	57
Fig. 9. Tirzah: the Iron Age IIA settlement . . . . .	59
Fig. 10. Tirzah: the Iron Age IIB settlement . . . . .	61
Fig. 11. Shikmona: general plan of the excavated area . . . . .	64
Fig. 12. Megiddo: the Iron II city . . . . .	66
Fig. 13. Jerusalem: the eighth-century city . . . . .	69
Fig. 14. Mizpah: general plan of the Iron II city . . . . .	73
Fig. 15. Beth-Shemesh: a group of Iron Age dwellings . . . . .	77
Fig. 16. Lachish: general plan of the Iron Age II city. . . . .	79
Fig. 17. Tell Beit Mirsim: general plan of the Iron Age II city. . . . .	81
Fig. 18. Tell Beit Mirsim: the northwestern quarter . . . . .	81
Fig. 19. Tell Beit Mirsim: the southeastern quarter. . . . .	82
Fig. 20. Beersheba: general plan of the Iron Age II city . . . . .	87
Fig. 21. H. Malta: a four-room house. . . . .	133
Fig. 22. Kh. Jemein: general plan of the Iron Age II village . . . . .	135
Fig. 23. Kh. Jemein: the wine-cellar . . . . .	137
Fig. 24. Beit Aryeh: general plan of the Iron Age II village . . . . .	139
Fig. 25. Kh. Jarish: general plan of the Iron Age II village . . . . .	143
Fig. 26. Two dwellings surveyed at Deir el-Mir . . . . .	146
Fig. 27. Kh. Banat Barr: general plan of the Iron Age II village . . . . .	147
Fig. 28. The foothills farmsteads: selected plans . . . . .	149
Fig. 29. The Ofarim farmstead: plan . . . . .	150
Fig. 30. Kh. Eli: plan of the farm buildings . . . . .	151
Fig. 31. Kh. Shilhah: plan . . . . .	152
Fig. 32. Kh. er-Ras 1: plan of the farmstead and its surroundings. . . . .	153
Fig. 33. Pisgat Zeev A: plan of the farmstead . . . . .	155
Fig. 34. Kh. Uza: plan of the fortress and the village . . . . .	181
Fig. 35. Kh. Radum: plan and reconstruction . . . . .	182
Fig. 36. Vered Yericho: plan of the site . . . . .	184
Fig. 37. The four-room house and its subtypes. . . . .	214
Fig. 38. The four-room house: access analysis . . . . .	221
Fig. 39a. Israelite perception of space: the settlement . . . . .	227
Fig. 39b. Israelite perception of space: the dwelling and the world . . . . .	228
Fig. 40. Tel Qiri: general plan of the village . . . . .	235
Fig. 41. Tel Qiri: excavated buildings. . . . .	236
Fig. 42. Tel Hadar: plan of the settlement . . . . .	238
Fig. 43. Access analysis: the four-room house and a simple Canaanite house compared . . . . .	242

### *Photographs*

Photograph 1. The Western Tower at Tell Beit Mirsim . . . . .	86
Photograph 2. Pillared buildings, Beersheba . . . . .	88
Photograph 3. A four-room house, Kh. Jemein. . . . .	136
Photograph 4. An installation for the production of olive-oil, Beit Areyh . . . . .	139
Photograph 5. An aerial photograph of the farm at Kh. er-Ras (1): the farmstead is located in the middle and is surrounded by its fields . . .	154
Photograph 6. The fort at Arad . . . . .	180

## *Preface and Acknowledgments*

Most archaeologists in the world consider the study of ancient societies to be a major theme of archaeological inquiry. Issues such as political organization, social stratification, community organization, and family structure constitute central questions in archaeological research, and scholars take an interest in studies in these areas even if they are unrelated to the specific case studies in which they specialize. However, these research questions are remote from the topics with which most Near Eastern archaeologists must deal. In the archaeology of the land of Israel and most of the neighboring areas, archaeological research has developed as a “handmaiden” to the study of the written sources. The first archaeological work in the region was initiated in order to illustrate and understand the written sources, particularly the Bible; thus the archaeology of the land of Israel focused on questions of political/biblical history.

Furthermore, even when archaeological research ceased attempting to illustrate or “prove” the veracity of the texts and adopted a more critical approach, the questions on the agenda continued to stem from the texts. Thus, for instance, in the past decade there have been lively debates regarding the historicity and very existence of the United Monarchy; the very research question stems from the written sources rather than from the archaeological evidence, regardless of scholars’ attitude toward it. As a result, the gap between the archaeology of the land of Israel and other archaeologies has deepened, and archaeologists working in Israel (excepting those studying the prehistoric era) rarely publish in general archaeology journals.

It should be stressed that the land of Israel—where there have been hundreds of planned excavations, thousands of salvage excavations and most of the country has been thoroughly surveyed—is undoubtedly a region that has been studied archaeologically much more vigorously than most other areas of the world. Thus, the archaeology of Israel could make a greater contribution to the issues that archaeologists in other regions are concerned with, since in many cases the various studies are based on poorer sets of data than we have today in Israel. However, the extensive information we possess has hardly been used to help with questions of an anthropological nature, which is a missed opportunity. In other words: the archaeological database in Israel, perhaps the richest in the world, has paradoxically not been exploited to discuss the questions that interest most of the archaeologists around the world.

This book is an attempt to use the rich archaeological information at our disposal to learn about the structure of society in the land of Israel during the period of the Monarchy, or Iron Age II. Although the study of Israelite society in this period has attracted many scholars, most of them are biblical scholars and

historians, they relied mainly on the Bible to reconstruct the nature of Israelite society, and they used the archaeological findings, at most, to illuminate the conclusions arising from the biblical texts. After more than a century of archaeological study in the land of Israel, this approach can be said to have exhausted itself. It is very difficult to innovate from the study of the written sources themselves, and it seems that research based on the archaeological findings has greater innovative potential, which is why this study differs from its predecessors. In this book, archaeological findings have usually served as a framework for the discussion, while the written sources usually only helped complete and illuminate the picture.

I should stress that I do not claim that studying the written sources is without value, since research dealing with a historical period that ignores the written sources is extremely problematic; however, it is worth reversing the current intellectual process by beginning the research into these issues on the basis of archaeological information, and then integrating (critically, of course) the written evidence into the discussion. Most of the debates in this book are written in this spirit, which may even shed new light on the written sources.<sup>1</sup> I hope that the research direction presented here will contribute to the understanding of Israelite society, significantly change many of the preconceptions regarding various aspects of this society that were based on the written sources, and even raise new issues that would not have been discussed at all without the emphasis on the archaeological findings.

The land of Israel is one of the world's most intensively studied regions, and Iron Age II is one of the periods that has been excavated and studied more than most. Our knowledge about this period is so extensive that it is impossible to deal with all the types of finds from the period in one book. In most chapters of this book, therefore, the emphasis is on architectural finds at various levels (town planning, public buildings, and private structures), and the smaller finds receive only partial discussion, both because they are less important for some of the central questions discussed in this work and because of space limitations. Thus, the current book only opens the discussion of the study of Israelite society and does not attempt to conclude it. We may hope that it raises interest and helps turn the archaeological research of ancient Israel toward social and anthropological topics that have yet to be exploited.

This book is an expanded and updated version of my Ph.D. dissertation (written in the Martin [Szusz] Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University, under Profs. Shlomo Bunimovitz and Ze'ev Safrai), which was subsequently published by Yad Ben-Zvi (in Hebrew, under the title *Israelite Society in the Period of the Monarchy: An Archaeological Perspective*). The Ph.D. dissertation was written in the late 1990s and was later updated and edited when it was prepared for publication in Hebrew. The present monograph was extensively updated again, and several discussions were added and expanded. (I hope that

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1. Note that some of the discussions of texts in this book are partial and not exhaustive and are intended for demonstrative purposes.

the numerous updates and additions have not made it more difficult to read.) Nevertheless, the basic structure of the book and of the various chapters was maintained, although it is likely that were I to start writing it today, I would have chosen a somewhat different structure, encompassing additional issues.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the preparation of the present monograph for publication, I attempted to substitute the Hebrew references (used in the original book) with English equivalents, whenever possible. In a number of cases, however, I discovered that the English translations of the Hebrew works were not always identical (for various reasons). In those cases, therefore, I referred to both versions (in most places I referred to the English version, but when the Hebrew version contained data not included in the English publication, I referred to it). Both versions are included, of course, in the bibliography.

Finally, it is my pleasant duty to thank the many people who have helped in the writing and completion of this book, including my Ph.D. advisers Shlomo Bunimovitz and Ze'ev Safrai, who devoted their time and contributed their thoughts and advice to my work and even guided me to the research I am doing today. I also received advice and criticism from these professors: Hanan Eshel, Aharon Demsky, Shimon Dar, Shmuel Vargon, Israel Finkelstein, Amihai Mazar, Israel Eph'al, and particularly Joshua Schwartz. Prof. Jack Silver assisted greatly in processing the data relating to social stratification (especially in chap. 6). Over many years of collecting material for the study, I received information from Profs. Itzhak Beit-Arieh, Adam Zertal, Moshe Kochavi, Dr. David Amit, and from Shimon Riklin. Many useful comments on the text were also offered by Noam Mizrahi, who edited the Hebrew manuscript. Thanks are also due to Yair Sapir, Pirchia Eyal, and Anat Eisner for their help in the preparation of the maps, figures, and bibliography, and to Ruth Ludlam, who translated this manuscript from Hebrew.

Some of the ideas expressed here I developed when I was a visiting graduate student at Keble College and the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford University (1997–98). I received much advice, which significantly influenced the shaping of the study, from Dr. Roger Moorey. I also received important comments from Prof. Barry Cunliffe, Dr. Andrew Sherratt, Dr. Susan Sherratt, and Prof. Peter Riviere. The Ph.D. dissertation was written with the assistance of a Rottenschtreich Grant provided by the Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council for Higher Education; and grants from the Krauthammer Chair in Archaeology; the Strauss Fund; the Moskovitz Fund at the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University; and a research grant from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. The translation and update of this

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2. This is also the reason that various issues did not receive proper treatment in this monograph and why chaps. 1 and 2, which summarize previous scholarship, are not fully up-to-date and do not reflect today's approaches (especially chap. 1), which differ from the approaches that were prevalent a decade ago. Nonetheless, because these chapters only summarize past research, I believe this deficiency will not reflect on the importance of the book in general. Finally, I hope that the many additions and updates will not inhibit the flow of the text.

work were assisted by the Kuschitsky Fund of the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, and the Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies, both at Bar-Ilan University.

I owe special thanks to my wife, Iris, who took upon herself many tasks, thus helping me devote most of my time to research; and to my children, Kama, Marvah, and Yannai.

# Abbreviations

## General

H.	Hurvat
Kh.	Khirbet
m	meter(s)

## Reference Works

AA	<i>American Anthropologists</i>
AAAn	<i>American Antiquity</i>
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ABD	Freedman, D. N. (ed.). <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992
ABS	<i>The American Behavioral Scientist</i>
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AJOS	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
EncMiq	Sukenik, E. L., et al. (eds.). <i>Encyclopedia Miqrait</i> . 9 vols. Jerusalem: Bialik, 1950–89. [Hebrew]
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JAA	<i>Journal of Anthropological Archaeology</i>
JAR	<i>Journal of Archaeological Research</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JFA	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	Stern, E. (ed.). <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta / New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993–2008
OTL	Old Testament Library
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>

<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	Society of Biblical Literature: Seminar Papers
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. J., and Ringgren, H. (eds.). <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>



# *Introduction*

## *The Place of this Book in Research*

Various aspects of Israelite society have been discussed in many studies in the recent and distant past. Many of these studies are comprehensive and relate to almost all aspects of society, while others examine a particular subject in detail. Most of these studies were written by biblical scholars or historians, relying mainly on information from the Bible and additional textual sources and sometimes also on sociological studies. A significant proportion of these studies did not use the archaeological evidence, or made very little use of it, usually as an illustration to accompany the text. Thus, for instance, the differences between the buildings in Tirzah (Tell el-Far‘ah, North) were stressed to demonstrate the social differences that the eighth-century B.C.E. prophets were denouncing (for example, de Vaux 1992: 1301). In contrast to the wealth of historical studies, archaeological research in the land of Israel has rarely dealt with social issues at all or with Israelite society in particular (Geva 1989: 11–12; Dever 1995: 416; Faust and Maeir 1999).

Referring to several important introductory books written recently about the archaeology of the land of Israel, William Dever wrote: “(Y)et, however adequate these may be as introductions to the basic data, none makes any attempt to organize the data in terms of social structure, even though there are many suggestive possibilities. This is a serious deficiency in Syro-Palestinian and biblical archaeology, when one considers that the general field of archaeology has been moving toward social archaeology for 20 years or more” (Dever 1995: 416). Lack of discussion of social questions has characterized the archaeology of the land of Israel for some time, even though around the world these questions constitute an important component of archaeological research (see, for instance, Renfrew 1984; 1994; Gibbon 1984; Blanton 1994; Dark 1995; Renfrew and Bahn 2004; Trigger 2006, and many other studies). An example of the accepted approach to the study of Israelite society can be seen in the introduction of Hanoch Reviv’s book about society in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Reviv 1993: 2):

The main written source of information for our study is the Bible. This source is lacking, because referring to society, in the widest sense of the term, was granted marginal importance by the authors [. . . who] showed more interest in the political aspect [. . .] of the actions of prominent people, in religion and worship and in stressing God’s role in history. The selective method used in the Bible, the bias [. . .] revealed in the writings has reduced the *realia* and [the value of the] information in its descriptions. So we can understand the reader’s need for additional sources, to complement and compare, such as relevant archaeological findings. It is well known that the *realia* arising from the material culture may contribute indirectly, if not directly, to the clarification of various issues in the lives of the ancients. The archaeological findings

may be of great assistance if they are properly inserted into the appropriate historical and chronological system. However, despite the increasing tendency of scholars to turn to a social interpretation of the findings [. . .] the possibilities entailed in the archaeological findings are still restricted to a limited number of aspects in the social processes in Israel and the ancient Near East.

Most of the studies about Israelite society were indeed written from a textual perspective. However, the historical sources on which these studies are based raise various problems. They should not be viewed as a full and objective documentation of reality but as a very partial documentation reflecting the viewpoint of a small minority—the literate elite. The sources almost never refer to the majority of the population, which resided in the rural sector, or even to the lower classes, who were the majority in the urban settlements. The extensive editing of the Bible, which is the main written source we possess on Israelite society, only aggravates the problem. Thus, it is difficult to reconstruct the structure and history of Israelite society based solely on the written sources. The purpose of this book is to fill in the blanks and to analyze the structure of society in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah from an archaeological viewpoint. We shall analyze the various archaeological finds that we now possess and examine them, applying models and theories from the field of social and cognitive archaeology, using the tools of various social-science disciplines (anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, etc.).

In contrast to previous studies, archaeological evidence constitutes the main source of information for this work, while the information that can be obtained from the Bible (that can usually be interpreted in more than one way) will be presented, in most cases, as an additional and complementary tool. At the same time, this additional information sometimes helps us choose between alternate interpretations of the archaeological finds, and in some cases enables the understanding of cognitive and other phenomena. The written sources, problematic though they may be, are very important for the understanding of Israelite society and, as we shall see in the book's various chapters, their very existence allows us to make the discussion more precise and to reach answers that could not have been obtained using the archaeological evidence alone. It is clear that ignoring the historical sources due to the difficulties they pose would be like throwing the baby out with the bathwater; instead, this study will use them cautiously. It appears to me that the combination of archaeological research and the historical sources should be achieved in the spirit of the New Biblical Archaeology approach promoted by William Dever in recent years (Dever 1993a; see also T. W. Davis 1993; 2004; Bunimovitz 1995; 2001; Bunimovitz and Faust 2010; Faust 2006b).

This monograph is one of the first attempts at a large-scale study of Israelite society mainly from the archaeological evidence. However, not only society in general is studied here for the first time from this direction. Many of the specific questions arising from this topic also receive here their first archaeological examination. The question of social stratification in the period under discussion has so far received only a few random references, usually without any systematic study, and the same is true of the question of community organization. The differences between Israel

and Judah will be reexamined while we refresh the research questions. The attempt to use archaeological findings to understand the cognitive aspects in this period is also quite new.

The rural settlements, an issue so far ignored in both historical and archaeological research (see, for example, Chaney 1986: 60; London 1989), receive full attention here. Since most of the population of Israel and Judah probably lived in this settlement sector, any attempt to investigate Israelite society without discussing it is doomed to failure. Despite all this, most previous studies have ignored this sector (which is why Ahlström termed Syro-Palestinian archaeology “tell minded”: Ahlström 1982a: 25; see also London 1989, who wrote about the “urban bias” of Near Eastern archaeology). Even though hardly any research has been devoted to this type of settlement, the many surveys conducted in the past few years, particularly the salvage excavations accompanying various development projects, have provided a great deal of information about this settlement sector, and this enables us to learn about Israelite society as a whole.

We may hope that some of the discussions offered here make a methodological contribution, the benefits of which will exceed the boundaries of the discussion of Israelite society. The method of examining social stratification is based on previous studies, but it contains innovations and may help other studies dealing with different periods and regions. Similar benefits could arise from the discussion of the principles behind the relations of small finds to social stratification and other debates, such as the importance of the study of villages for identifying ethnic groups. However, it should be stressed that since the discussions in this book are preliminary in nature, some of the conclusions are temporary, and only further studies and an accumulation of additional information will enable them to be proved or disproved.

### *The Period under Discussion*

This study deals with the period of the Monarchy, particularly with the eighth–seventh centuries B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is the nature of the material we currently possess. This period is one of the best-documented periods in the entire biblical era from almost all aspects of research: archaeology, epigraphy, and history. From the archaeological viewpoint, the levels from these centuries are in many cases the upper levels on the biblical tells, and therefore many of the excavations in the country reveal levels from this period. Due to the nature of archaeological excavations, a wider area of the upper levels will always be uncovered compared with the area of the levels below. The intensity of settlement in Iron Age II, particularly in the eighth century (and in parts of Judah also the seventh century), also contributes to our knowledge, since this was a period of demographic peak: a large proportion of the *tells* were settled, usually over extensive areas. The form of destruction of these

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1. While the previous stages of the period of the Monarchy will be mentioned in the book and discussed, mainly in chapter 9, we shall not digress in this book into a detailed discussion of the processes that accompanied the transition from Iron Age I to Iron Age II or of the beginning of the period of the Monarchy.

levels also contributes to the archaeological knowledge of the period. Since in many cases the settlements were destroyed in war (probably during the campaigns of the kings of Assyria and Babylon), the findings remained *in situ*, which helps reconstruct the nature of human activity relatively accurately. Moreover, since the period raised great interest in the archaeology of the land of Israel (with its historical orientation), the excavators often focused on tells that had extensive settlement particularly in this period. Many settlements were widely exposed (Tell Beit Mirsim, Tel Beth-Shemesh, Megiddo, Beth Shean, and others), although some were excavated and published in a very unsatisfactory manner, which restricts our ability to use their data. The demographic and settlement growth that characterized the period led to the appearance of many more rural and agricultural settlements compared with most other periods, and settlements of this type have been excavated in salvage excavations.

From an epigraphic viewpoint, the sources from this period are also more plentiful than those from earlier periods. Presumably this results from the large number of excavations and findings from this period. But it does also appear that in this period literacy became more established and widespread than in the past, and as a result there is an increase in written findings, such as the Samaria ostraca, the Lachish letters, the Arad letters, and so on.

From the viewpoint of historical sources, no other period is documented in the Bible in such detail (at least before the Babylonian Exile). Most of the books of the Prophets and a significant proportion of the historical books describe this period. These books and some other biblical books were written during the period under discussion and thus contain a vast amount of information, albeit problematic, about it. In this period there are also more external historical sources (from Assyria, Babylon, etc.), but their relevance to this study is relatively marginal, and their main contribution is in reconstructing political and military history.

### *The Book's Structure*

This book discusses the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in terms of complete social systems and also examines various aspects within them. The first two chapters present the conclusions of previous research on these issues, and the innovation there is only in the collation of the material and its organized and comprehensive presentation. The first chapter summarizes the extensive historical research and presents the basic components of Israelite society and the processes it underwent, while the second chapter summarizes the archaeological research, which is more limited in its extent.

The third chapter analyzes the archaeological findings from the cities and towns of the period. After proposing a definition of the urban sector, I present a short discussion of the research methodology and the main topics behind this study, such as the way to measure inequality in the archaeological record. The main substance of this chapter is analyzing the archaeological findings in each settlement in terms of the various social characteristics (public-royal components, social stratification, family size, economic organization, and so on). A comparison of the evidence from

different cities enables us to try and learn about the general social features of each of the kingdoms, about common traits of all the settlements discussed, and about differences among different stages within the Iron Age.

The fourth chapter examines the rural sector. Here too, the discussion opens with a definition of the rural sector and its characteristics and continues with an analysis of the findings in each settlement, with an attempt to discover its degree of social stratification and the community organization. Next, several features that distinguish Israel compared with Judah are examined, and the eighth century B.C.E. is compared with the seventh. We also examine features common to the entire rural sector, such as family structure, community organization, and social stratification. The chapter notes the differences between the rural and the urban sectors and several methodological issues related to identifying community organization and family structure in the archaeological record.

The analysis in chaps. 3 and 4 applies mainly to the intermediate level (the "meso" level), meaning the individual settlement (on the various levels of analysis, see T. E. Levy [ed.] 1995: xiii–xiv; Clarke 1977: 11–15), and only afterward is there a comprehensive and comparative discussion, with the summary of the data from the various settlements constituting a partial analysis of the society in general (the "macro" level). The two chapters focus on the architectural finding, from various residential structures through public buildings up to the settlement plan. The small finds are discussed only in a few cases, mainly in order to demonstrate the problems raised in using them to deduce wealth, community organization, and economic structure. This problem, briefly discussed in the relevant chapters, receives a detailed discussion in the appendix to chap. 3.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 5 examines the phenomenon of fortified structures in rural areas (usually identified as fortresses). The definition of these buildings justifies a separate discussion. If these were fortresses, they should be viewed as an urban element located in the rural sector,<sup>3</sup> but if they were estates or farms, they were agricultural sites. Despite the apparent similarity between estates and farms, the two options are very different: farms are part of the rural sector (and many of them are discussed in chap. 4), while estates, despite their geographic location and economic nature, constitute in many respects a branch of the city, since their "profits" and surplus reached the city. Also the social system of an estate is very different from that of a farm. The interpretation of these buildings thus has implications for the understanding of Israelite society as a whole.

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2. Of course, pottery is the most important finding, as it teaches us about many topics (see, for example, in chap. 8). However, for the analysis to be significant, one must accurately reconstruct the place where the vessels were in use. In many cases one cannot know where the vessels were found during the excavation, either because the report is old and does not provide the required information or because there is no excavation report at all. In many excavations in which the data are available, the exposure is so limited that they are irrelevant to the study of most aspects of society (since this requires the excavation of complete structures, preferably more than one). This makes it difficult to use pottery (and small finds in general) for the purposes of this study.

3. The existence of a permanent army has implications for the social organization and structure, but the issue of the armies in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the source of the personnel in them, and other such issues have yet to receive a thorough study.

Chapter 6 examines several topics related directly to the “macro” level: monumental buildings, complex administrative and military organizations, and social and settlement hierarchies (assuming that the evidence reveals the degree of complexity of the societies under discussion). Checking the data concerning the kingdoms of Israel and Judah shows the similarities and differences and the developments that took place during the period. The data about the “macro” level are correlated with a more extensive analysis of the data from the “meso” level to provide a general picture of society.

Chapter 7 deals with cognitive analysis. The chapter examines the dominant residential house in Israelite society during the period of the Monarchy (the “four-room houses” of various types), the reasons for its exceptional popularity, and the social meanings it embodied.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 8 deals with a difficult problem in archaeological research, the “pots and people” problem: can ethnic groups be identified in the archaeological findings? This chapter tries to evaluate the existence of various ethnic groups in the period under discussion, the complex relations between these groups, and the overall social structure. The starting point for this chapter is the rural sector, where it is easier to identify ethnic groups compared with urban settlements (where, in many cases, different ethnic groups resided together).

Chapter 9 briefly summarizes the process of change that Israelite society underwent from the end of the settlement period (the Iron Age I) onward, and describes how the social reality developed, the various aspects of which were described in the previous chapters.

It should be stressed that most of the discussions in this book are of a preliminary nature. Many questions are not discussed at all, while some of the analyses presented here are open to different interpretations. However, even if not all the conclusions are accepted in research, the strength of this book is in the extent of the discussion, the combination of the different analysis levels, and particularly the direction of the research.

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4. The term *four-room house* is used in this book in its generic meaning and usually includes all the subtypes.

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