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Abstract

The article attempts to reconstruct the history of southern Israel (the Beersheba Valley, the Shephelah and the southern Coastal Plain) in the Late Iron I and Iron IIA. It shows that activity in the so-called ‘Tel Masos chiefdom’ commenced in the Iron I and peaked in the Early Iron IIA—parallel to the copper mining activity at Khirbet en-Nahas. Regarding the early phase of this time-span, the article proposes that the Sheshonq I campaign did not bring about the destruction of the Tel Masos chiefdom; rather, the major phase of activity in the south—in the Early Iron IIA—was a result of Egyptian involvement in the region. Regarding the end of the Iron IIA, the article rejects the notion that the Iron IIA–IIB transition should be affiliated with the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1: 1; it dates this transition to ca. 800 BCE.

In a recent article in this journal, Ze’ev Herzog and Lily Singer-Avitz (2004) identified two Iron Age ceramic phases in Judah and the south, which they labelled Early and Late Iron IIA. In regard to the absolute dating of these phases, they offered the following observations (2004: 229):

1. Arad XII (dating to the Early Iron IIA) should be associated with Sheshonq I’s campaign; accordingly, the beginning of the Iron IIA should be placed in the mid-10th century BCE (also Zimhoni 1985; for somewhat similar reasoning see Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 274–275; Mazar 2005: 19–20).

2. The end of the Iron IIA should be associated with the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1: 1 (2004: 229–230; following Ussishkin 1977: 52). This event is dated to ca. 760 BCE (Dever 1992), ca. 750 BCE (Austin, Franz and Frost 2000), or “any time between 780 and 740 BCE” (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004: 230).

3. Because of the intensity of building activity in the Late Iron IIA (fortifications and other public works at Lachish IV, Beth-shemesh IIa, Arad XI and Beersheba V), this phase must be allotted a longer time span, and the transition from the Early to the Late Iron IIA should accordingly be dated to “the late 10th or early 9th century BCE, with a rounded date to 900 BCE” (ibid.: 229).

We accept Herzog and Singer-Avitz’s observations regarding the two stratigraphic and ceramic Iron IIA phases in Judah and the south. Yet, we have reservations
regarding their chronological anchors. In what follows we wish to challenge the observations mentioned above; though our adjustments to Herzog and Singer-Avitz may seem minimal, they have far-reaching historical implications and suggest a revised reconstruction of the history of the south in the Late Iron I and Iron IIA.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL ANCHORS

The Beginning of the Early Iron IIA: Sheshonq I and Arad

The association of ‘ rubbed of the Sheshonq I list with Stratum XII at Tel Arad has long been accepted as an important peg in Iron Age chronology (e.g., Finkelstein 1996: 180–181; Mazar 1997: 160–161; 2005: 19–20). Yet, this linkage is not free of difficulties:

(1) Only a marginal section of the settlement has been unearthed.
(2) Identification of the loci belonging to this stratum is still under debate (Zimhoni 1985; Herzog 2002: 17).
(3) Later forts cover the top of the hill. They could have obliterated not only the main part of the Stratum XII settlement but earlier remains as well.
(4) The pottery assemblage that can safely be attributed to Stratum XII is small (Singer-Avitz 2002: 111–119).
(5) The name ‘rubbed (Great Arad) may have originated from the huge ruins of the Early Bronze city, which must still have been visible in the 10th century BCE; in other words, ‘rubbed of Sheshonq I was not necessarily a large settlement.

These arguments mean that Arad cannot serve as the linchpin in this discussion. The spotlight should therefore be shifted to the broader phenomenon in the south, which one of us long ago labelled the “Tel Masos chiefdom” (Finkelstein 1988; 1995: 103–126).

There can be no doubt that in the south the Sheshonq I list, which includes a large number of toponyms in the Negev, should be associated with the Tel Masos chiefdom phenomenon. Tel Masos was the largest settlement and probably the hub of this system, which consisted of sites in the Beersheba Valley (such as Arad XII, Tel Esdar II and Beersheba VII), the Negev Highlands (Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004; for their function see Finkelstein 1995: 103–114) and the lower Nahal Besor area (Gophna and Singer-Avitz 1984; Gazit and Gophna 1993). Eliminating this equation means stripping the Sheshonq I list of any reality on the ground. All these sites date to the same period—broadly speaking the Early Iron IIA. The richest pottery assemblage belonging to this settlement system is that of Stratum II at Tel Masos (Fritz and Kempinski 1983).

As we have already mentioned, most scholars see the Sheshonq I campaign,
which has traditionally been dated (based on 1 Kings 14: 25) to ca. 926/925 BCE, as marking the end of the Tel Masos chiefdom prosperity. Accordingly, Herzog and Singer-Avitz dated the beginning of the Iron IIA to the mid-10th century (see also Mazar 2005: 20). There are two problems with this premise:

(1) No trace of a wholesale or meaningful destruction has been found in the Tel Masos chiefdom sites. Ostensibly, archaeologists did identify destruction layers in the Negev Highlands sites (e.g., Cohen 1976: 36–38) and associated them with the Sheshonq I assault, and evidence of destruction of Masos II is reported by Fritz and Kempinski (1983: 9). Yet, patches of ashes found in the Negev Highlands sites can be explained as the remains of fire-places in the rooms (Finkelstein 1984: 193; Meshel 1994: 60; for a similar case in Early Bronze II sites in the Sinai see Beit-Arieh 1977: 83). And evidence of destruction at Tel Masos is limited to collapsed structures in Area A, which should not necessarily be interpreted as the result of a military assault. We can thus safely state that no significant layer of destruction was found at Tel Masos II. There can be little doubt, therefore, that the Iron IIA sites in the south were abandoned and not destroyed.

(2) Associating the decline of the Tel Masos chiefdom with the Sheshonq I campaign and consequently dating the beginning of the Iron IIA in the south to the mid-10th century stands in contradiction to recent 14C results from the north, which put the beginning of the Iron IIA in the late 10th century (Boaretto et al. 2005). Indeed, a close examination of the pottery from locations in the Tel Masos system shows that at least some sites were probably established somewhat earlier, in the Late Iron I.

In order to define the beginning of activity in the relevant sites, one needs to look at the earliest items in their assemblages. Certain forms that appear at Masos II seem to indicate that its early days should be placed in the Late Iron I. We refer, for example, to S-shaped bowls (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: Pls. 134: 7; 136: 2; 137: 1; 156: 3–5), Phoenician bichrome vessels (ibid.: Pls. 145: 1; 146: 1) and Late Iron I cooking-pots (ibid.: Pls. 145: 8, 156: 9). This is not surprising, as Tel Masos (Stratum III) was inhabited in the Iron I. But the same can be said about the Besor-area settlements (e.g., Gophna and Singer-Avitz 1984: Figs. 41: 8; 42: 3, 7; see Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004: 225) as well as the Negev Highlands sites: A few types in their repertoire may hint that activity in at least some of them commenced in the Late Iron I (e.g., Cohen and Cohen-Amin 2004: Figs. 37: 8; 40: 4; 55: 9; ibid.: 133; for Midianite pottery see ibid.: 141; Meshel and Cohen 1980: 6, 8–9). It should be noted that other vessels found at Tel Masos and the Negev Highlands sites—such as certain kraters and cooking-pots—can be dated to either the Late Iron I or the Early Iron IIA.
A Late Iron I date for the commencement of activity in the Negev Highlands sites seems to be supported by radiocarbon measurements of charcoal from Kadesh-barnea and the site of Nahal Elah, which provided 1σ highest probability dates in the 11th and early 10th centuries BCE respectively (Bruins and van der Plicht 2005: 352); these dates are too early for the Iron IIA even according to Mazar’s (2005) “Modified Conventional Chronology”.¹

Thus far we have offered two observations: 1) That the Tel Masos chiefdom sites were not destroyed by fire; 2) That sites belonging to the Tel Masos chiefdom were already established in the Late Iron I. These observations cut the linkage between the Sheshonq I campaign and the end phase of the Early Iron IIA, including the end of Arad XII. In fact, there are strong reasons to suggest that the main phase of prosperity in the south followed the Sheshonq I campaign (below).

Before continuing, we wish to emphasize that there is no way to precisely date the Sheshonq I campaign: We do not know the precise date of the pharaoh’s accession to the throne,² and it is not clear at which stage of his reign he conducted the campaign (Redford 1992: 312). The widely accepted date of 926/925 BCE is based on the biblical account and is therefore questionable; all we can say is that the campaign took place sometime in the second half of the 10th century BCE (Wente 1976: 276; Ash 1999: 34; Finkelstein 2002). Against this background, and taking all the above evidence into consideration—mainly the observation that the Sheshonq I campaign did not seal the history of the Tel Masos chiefdom—we would date the beginning of the Iron IIA in the south to the late 10th century, slightly later than the date suggested by Herzog and Singer-Avitz. Accordingly the assemblage of Masos II, which probably represents the end days of the Early Iron IIA, cannot be placed before or shortly after ca. 900 BCE.

Our dates fit what we know from ¹⁴C investigations of the last few years: The Late Iron I ‘New Canaan’ system in the northern valleys was destroyed sometime in the mid-10th century BCE (Finkelstein and Piasetzky forthcoming) and the transition from the Iron I to the Iron IIA should be placed in the late 10th century (Boaretto et al. 2005; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2006).

The Transition from the Early to Late Iron IIA

Excavations at Tell es-Safi, the site of biblical Gath, revealed evidence for an intensive destruction by fire during the Late Iron IIA (temporary Stratum 4). The pottery retrieved from the destruction layer (Maeir 2001; Shai and Maeir 2003) is

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¹ At both sites there is no earlier layer, which reduces the danger of old wood effect.
² Shortland (2005) has not resolved the problem. His reconstruction is based on a large number of uncertainties that may lead to a different result, and, against his initial declaration, is indirectly based on the biblical account.
the most comprehensive assemblage of this period unearthed thus far in the south. This destruction layer should most probably be associated with the assault of Hazael, king of Aram Damascus on Gath, reported in 2 Kings 12: 18 (Maeir 2004). Recent research, based on textual material and the results of excavations at sites such as Jezreel (e.g., Ussishkin and Woodhead 1997: 69–70), has demonstrated the power of Hazael’s state (Eph’al and Naveh 1989; Lemaire 1991; Na’aman 1995; Hafthorsson 2006) and confirmed the biblical information on his attack on the Northern Kingdom (Na’aman 1997a). Hence the biblical report on the assault on Gath seems to relate to a reliable historical event. Indeed, two ¹⁴C measurements taken from the destruction layer provide dates in the middle of the 9th century BCE or slightly later (Aren Maeir, personal communication). Samples taken from Late Iron II strata destruction layers in the north confirm this date (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2003; Boaretto et al. 2005). Since the Tell es-Safi Stratum 4 assemblage represents a fully-developed stage of the Late Iron IIA ceramic repertoire, the transition from the Early to Late Iron IIA should be fixed sometime earlier, during the first half of the 9th century BCE.

The End of the Late Iron IIA: The Earthquake in the Early 8th Century BCE?

It is reasonable to assume that the assemblage from Tell es-Safi does not mark the end of the Late Iron IIA. So how long did this pottery repertoire endure after this datum? Ussishkin proposed (1977: 52; 2004: 83; Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 447; also Zimhoni 1997: 172–173) that the changeover at Lachish from Level IV to Level III was related to the seismic event mentioned in Amos 1: 1 and Zechariah 14: 5. This gave birth to the theory that a major earthquake was the reason for the transition from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB. This idea was adopted by Herzog and Singer-Avitz (2004: 230) for the transition from Stratum IV to Stratum III at Tel Beersheba and from Stratum XI to X at Arad (see also Herzog 2002: 97–98; Singer-Avitz 2002: 162). At first glance the earthquake theory looks quite appealing; yet, it is difficult to accept.

As far as we can judge, no evidence of the kind expected to be left by a major earthquake (see, e.g., Marco et al. forthcoming) has ever been found at any Judahite site. The earthquake theory was formulated merely in order to explain a stratigraphic/architectonic change. Indeed, even at Lachish the excavators admit that “no unequivocal proof of this is available” (Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 447).³

³ Dever (1992) interpreted a tilt in the Outer Wall at Gezer as a result of the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1: 1. Yet, no real evidence for a quake exists at Gezer. The changes described by Dever could have been caused by centuries of fill-pressure on the city wall, which is located on the slope of the mound. Note that the sections of the city wall described by Dever were all part of a sub-structure, which was buried in the ground from the outset and hence could hardly have been affected by a quake; also note that no evidence for a seismic event has ever been found in any free-standing building at Gezer.
This is in contrast to the north, where evidence for a major seismic event in the 8th century was found at Hazor (the destruction of Stratum VI—Yadin et al. 1960: 24–26; 1989: 41, 44) and possibly also at Megiddo (in Stratum IVA—Marco et al. forthcoming) and Tell Deir Alla (Austin et al. 2000: 659). Indeed, an earthquake is a localized event, which can hardly devastate very large areas such as Israel and Judah combined (ibid.). Hazor, Deir Alla and Megiddo are located along major geological faults—of the Rift Valley and the Carmel Ridge respectively—and hence have always been sensitive to seismic events.4 In contrast, the Shephelah and the Beersheba Valley are far from the Rift Valley and show no evidence of earthquakes in other periods either. Finally, from the ceramic point of view, it is impossible to equate Iron IIA Lachish IV and Arad XI with Iron IIB Hazor VI. Indeed, the fact that the earthquake in the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam II is mentioned only by a prophet who was active in the north, with no reference to it in any Judahite source,5 seems to indicate that Judah was not affected, or at least did not suffer significant damage. The theory that an earthquake was responsible for a major stratigraphic and architectural transition in Judah rests on very shaky ground and should be eliminated from consideration.

In any event, the idea that the potters of Judah changed their repertoire as a result of a seismic event is unacceptable (indeed, no such change can be observed in the north in the transition from Hazor VI to Hazor V). Major changes in ceramic repertoires, such as the shift from the Lachish IV to the Lachish III assemblages, must have been caused by broader economic and political processes, not by a solitary event. So the question remains: What is the date and the reason for the transition from the Late Iron IIA to the Iron IIB ceramic repertoires in the south?

One clue comes from the site of Arad, where three strata—X, IX and VIII—feature quite similar Iron IIB pottery repertoires. Stratum VIII was destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Since the sequence of the three strata requires some time, it would be reasonable to assume that the Iron IIB pottery was already fully developed no later than the mid-8th century BCE, and in fact probably earlier (also Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 274–275; Faust 2005: 107, n. 13).

Additional clues come from the north. Stratum VI at Hazor, which probably dates to the first half of the 8th century—the days of Joash and Jeroboam II, after the

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4 Austin et al. (2000: 667–669) located the epicentre of the earthquake in the Beqa of Lebanon. Yet, this is based on an uncritical reading of the archaeological ‘evidence’ mentioned vis-à-vis the Amos event, including sites such as Lachish and Tel Beersheba (see also the tilted wall at En Haseva—ibid.: 662—which could have resulted from pressure of a fill, not necessarily an earthquake).

5 Zechariah 14: 5 (part of Deutero-Zechariah) is a late (Hellenistic?) source that could not have had any independent information on this event; he must have relied on Amos 1: 1.
recovery of Israel from the Aramean pressure—features Iron IIB pottery, while Strata VIII–VII, which seem to represent the second half of the 9th century (Finkelstein 1999), still feature some Iron IIA types. At Megiddo, Level H-4, which predates Level H-3 (=Stratum IVA) that was destroyed by the Assyrians, also features Iron IIB pottery (Finkelstein forthcoming). The assemblage of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud is closely related to the coast and the north and is contemporaneous with Hazor VI and Ashdod VIII (Ayalon 1995: 196–197). 14C measurements of wood remains from the site provide dates in the early 8th century BCE (Carmi and Segal 1996; for this argument, with certain nuances, see also Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 275; Singer-Avitz 2002: 163).

All this means that in the north, the transition from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB pottery repertoires probably took place around 800 BCE, parallel to the growth of the Assyrian-influenced state economy in Israel, when the Northern Kingdom reached peak prosperity. Since we are dealing with a relatively small country, and since the economies of Israel and Judah were probably related again at that time (under Northern dominance), we would argue that in Judah, too, the transition from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB should be set ca. 800 BCE. If it turns out that Lachish IV and Beth-shemesh IIA were built after the fall of Gath (below), a somewhat later date would be preferable.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH IN THE LATE IRON I AND IRON IIA

A Desert Polity

Most if not all periods of prosperity in the arid zones of the Levant in protohistoric and historic times were caused by improved economic conditions that had been initiated, in turn, by demand in the sedentary lands for desert commodities (Finkelstein 1995). Several years ago one of us suggested linking the rise of the Tel Masos chiefdom with two economic enterprises in the south: an early phase of Arabian trade and copper production in the northeastern Arabah (Finkelstein 1988; 1995: 120–122; see also Tebes 2003). Later research has failed to present clear evidence for significant connections with Arabia as early as the Iron I or the Iron IIA (Knauf 1992: 49).6 But recent investigation at Khirbet en-Nahas in the Wadi Feinan area has revealed evidence for strong mining and smelting activity in the Iron I and Iron IIA (Levy et al. 2004; 2005; also Fritz 1996; Hauptmann 2000).

6 Though the adoption of the alphabet in south Arabia in the first half of the 9th century BCE (Sass 2005: 96–132) would imply the existence of such connections during the Late Iron IIA, if not earlier.
$^{14}$C results from Khirbet en-Naḥas show that this activity commenced in the 12th century—possibly in the later part of that century—peaked in the 11th century and continued, probably at the same pace, until late in the 9th century BCE (Levy et al. 2005: 134–136; Higham et al. 2005).

The strong copper industry at Khirbet en-Naḥas must be related to the Tel Masos phenomenon (Fritz 2002; Finkelstein 2005). Tel Masos emerged in Stratum III of the Iron I, with the beginning of mining and smelting at Khirbet en-Naḥas, and reached its peak prosperity in the days of Stratum II, in the Iron IIA. And it revealed clear evidence of a copper industry (Kempinski et al. 1983: 21; Crüsemann 1983; Lupu 1983: 202–203; Fritz 2002). The strong mining activity at Khirbet en-Naḥas should be understood, as first suggested by Knauf (1991: 185; 1995: 112–113; 2000: 81–87), against the background of the secession and resumption of copper-trade relations between Cyprus and the Levant: Khirbet en-Naḥas emerged with the breakdown of the trade networks in the eastern Mediterranean in the 12th century,7 and was weakened by the revival of contacts with Cyprus in the 9th century BCE.8

The pastoral nomads of the south must have participated in the mining, smelting and transportation of the copper to the Coastal Plain—and hence benefited from the prosperity of the copper industry. This was probably the prime-mover behind the sedentarization of the pastoral nomads—the appearance of sites in the Beersheba Valley, the Negev Highlands and the Besor Region—and the rise of a nomadic desert polity with its gateway community at Tel Masos.9 Sedentarization and nomadization processes are always gradual and relatively slow, starting a while after the beginning of the economic and social processes that trigger them. Accordingly, the commencement of Khirbet en-Naḥas copper production in the second half of the 12th century brought about the beginning of sedentarization as

7 The lack of late Cypriot IIIIB ceramic imports in the region (Gilboa and Sharon 2003: 65) is in line with Knauf’s proposal.
8 The Khirbet en-Naḥas evidence eliminates the theory (e.g., McNutt 1990: 151–154) that explained the emergence of iron-working technology as a response to shortage of copper after ca. 1200/1150 BCE (also Muhly 1992; 1998). Incidentally, it appears that Cypriot copper production continued without major interruptions throughout the 12th–11th centuries BCE and later (Zaccagnini 1990; Muhly 1998; 2003). It seems, however, that during the period of the Khirbet en-Naḥas prosperity in the Iron I and Iron IIA, Cypriot copper was traded mainly to the West (for Cypriot long-distance communications with the western Mediterranean during the Iron I see Crielaard 1999; Kourou 2000; Matthäus 2001).
9 The Negev Highlands sites were located away from the copper routes, but offered improved ecological conditions that enabled the conducting of seasonal agriculture while at the same time maintaining herding as an important component in the subsistence economy.
early as the Iron I at Tel Masos III and Beersheba IX. The process intensified in the Late Iron I and even more so in the Early Iron IIA.10

Sheshonq I

As we stated above, with no evidence for destruction in any of the sites that constitute the Tel Masos chiefdom, there is no reason to associate its end with the Sheshonq I campaign (for Arad already Herzog 2002: 17). Moreover, such a linkage would go against what we now know about the date of Late Iron I/Iron IIA transition in the north (Boaretto et al. 2005). Indeed, 14C dates from Khirbet en-Naḥas (Levy et al. 2005; Higham et al. 2005) indicate that production there continued well into the 9th century BCE. It is only logical to assume that the Tel Masos chiefdom, too, continued to prosper after the Egyptian campaign.

Several scholars have suggested that the Sheshonq I campaign was no more than a razzia (e.g., Noth 1958: 240; Redford 1973: 11). This idea was probably shaped by accepting the biblical description of a great United Monarchy in the 10th century BCE. Yet, empires—even the weakened Egypt of the time—usually do not conduct raids; they almost always have long-term policies. Hence it is reasonable to assume that Sheshonq I’s involvement in the Levant was aimed at re-establishing an Egyptian political and economic grip on the region (Drioton and Vandier 1962: 525–526; Ussishkin 1990) in a period that was still characterized by a political vacuum, that is, with no significant territorial polity in Canaan.

Low-profile Egyptian involvement in Canaan could have commenced in the late 21st dynasty, in the days of Siamun (Münger 2005: 398–39911), but it certainly intensified in the early days of the 22nd dynasty. Egyptian long-term impact on Canaan at that time is attested by several finds: the Sheshonq I stele erected at Megiddo (Ussishkin 1990: 71–74), renewed connection with Byblos (Kitchen 1986: 292) and possibly the widespread appearance of post-Ramesside mass-produced stamp-seal amulets (Münger 2003; 2005; for the possibility that the Wenamun tale

10 A similar link between the Wadi Feinan copper production and settlement activity in the arid zone to its west is apparently evident in the Early and Intermediate Bronze Ages (Gophna and Milevski 2003; and Haiman 1996; Yekutieli et al. 2005 respectively). The fact that Feinan’s copper industry was not active in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (Levy et al. 2004: 866) conforms with the dominance of Cypriot copper production at that time. The reason for the absence of settlements in the Beersheba Valley during the Late Bronze Age must therefore be sought in the cessation of copper production at Feinan. The extent to which it was Egypt that prevented the flow of Feinan copper to the Mediterranean milieu during much of the second millennium BCE remains to be explored.

11 Kitchen’s arguments for Siamun’s involvement in Canaan/Israel (1986: 280–282) are based on his interpretation of the biblical description of the days of Solomon. Yet, this description reflects Late Iron II realities and needs (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 151–177) and hence cannot be used to prove the case.
reflects Egyptian interests in the days of Sheshonq I, see Sass 2002). Some other pieces of evidence may be linked to the same phenomenon:

(1) A small faience rim fragment from Buseirah in the heartland of Edom was identified by Milward (1975) as part of an Egyptian relief chalice, stylistically belonging to the 21st or 22nd dynasty.

(2) The inscription of Pa-di-Eset, son of Apy, ‘emissary of Canaan of Philist(ines)’, possibly found in the Delta, may belong to the 22nd dynasty (Steindorff 1939; Singer 1994: 330 with earlier references). In such a case it would provide evidence for renewed diplomatic ties between Egypt and Philistia at that time. However, neither the provenance nor the date of the inscription are definitive.

(3) There may be an Egyptian influence in the architecture and pottery of Tel Masos (Conrad and Crüsemann 1983: 64–65; Oren 1984 and Kempinski 1983: 78 respectively).

(4) A fragment of an alabaster vase with the name of Osorkon II—probably sent as a royal gift—was found at Samaria (Reisner, Fisher and Lyon 1924: 247 and Pl. 56g).

(5) An Egyptian contingent seems to have participated in the battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE.

All these traits—together with the Karnak relief—are similar to some of the manifestations of Egyptian interests (and rule) in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age (Weinstein 1981; 1998).

Under these circumstances, Egyptian destruction of the lucrative Khirbet en-Nahas–Tel Masos network would be an unimaginable, indeed unparalleled step. The opposite was probably the case: The Egyptian goal in the south must have been to take over the Khirbet en-Nahas–Tel Masos system, preserve and promote it. Unlike the rest of the Mediterranean, where iron production increased during the early first millennium BCE, Egypt appears to have moved to the widespread utilitarian usage of iron only a few centuries later (Ogden 2000: 168). With the cessation of contacts with Cyprus, and with no evidence of Iron Age activity in Timna, the north Arabah copper must have been the major—if not only—source of copper for Egypt. It seems to us, therefore, that rather than annihilating the Tel Masos chieftdom, the Egyptian campaign brought about increased prosperity in the south. In other words, regarding the main phase in the southern desert copper prosperity, the Sheshonq I campaign should be seen as a beginning, not an end.

The copper trade must have been controlled by the Philistine cities in the southern Coastal Plain. The Philistine cities are not mentioned in the Sheshonq I list (for a summary see Finkelstein 2002: 116). Though one could argue that their names appeared in the damaged part of the relief, it is more reasonable to propose that they cooperated with the pharaoh (Na’am an 1998: 266). The southern Coastal Plain was
always the jumping-off point for Egyptian involvement in Canaan. Had Sheshonq I aimed at reviving the Ramesside Empire, cooperating with the Philistine cities (especially those on the coast) would have been his best strategy. The most powerful Philistine city in the Iron I could have been Ekron (we do not know enough about Gaza and Gath), and among the Philistine cities, archaeology has thus far apparently revealed a major Late Iron I destruction only there (e.g., Dothan 2000). Though the exact nature (including magnitude) and date of this destruction are far from clear, it is possible that Sheshonq I attacked Ekron, which—for economic reasons—could have resisted the Egyptian interests. In the same breath one may assume that Gath came to prominence in the south and replaced Ekron as a result of the Egyptian campaign (more below).

It seems, then, that Egypt and the Philistine cities took over the copper trade in the same way that Assyria and the Philistine cities several centuries later took over Arabian trade. And similar to the Assyrian case, this means that prosperity in the south accelerated after the Sheshonq I campaign. To sum up this issue, control over the lucrative Levantine copper trade could have been a significant target for the Egyptian interests of that time.

Egypt may have sustained its involvement in the region (including the north, which is beyond the scope of this article) in the days of the still relatively strong Osorkon I, whose statue was discovered at Byblos (Kitchen 1986: 302–308). Domestic problems seem to have weakened Egypt after his reign (ibid.: 309–312). Whether Egypt continued to pursue its goals in the Levant during the long reign of the stronger Osorkon II, until the mid-9th century (see Kitchen 1986: 323–325 on his statue at Byblos, the vase found at Samaria and the battle of Qarqar), is difficult to say.

An Omride Phase?

The Tel Masos chiefdom sites disappeared before the Late Iron IIA, that is, sometime in the first half of the 9th century BCE. Since we are dealing with an abandonment process, the deterioration must have been gradual. This observation is corroborated by the decline at Tel Masos between Strata II and I.

The gradual demise of the Tel Masos chiefdom must have been linked to the revival (or better, re-intensification12) of contacts between Cyprus and the Levant in the 9th century BCE. Cypriot copper was traded again to northern Levantine ports and this diminished the importance of the Arabah ores (Knauf 1991: 185). From the pottery perspective, it seems that these contacts were renewed quite early

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12 Some contacts between Cyprus and the Levant did continue during the Iron I (Muhly 1999; Gilboa 2005; Gilboa and Sharon 2003: 64–67).
in the Iron IIA, but not in its very beginning: At Tel Rehov, Black-on-Red pottery appears for the first time in Stratum V, while it is absent from Stratum VI of the very early Iron IIA (A. Mazar, personal communication). Radiocarbon measurements put Stratum V at Tel Rehov in the early 9th century BCE (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2003; 2006; contra Mazar 2005, who now dates it to the late 10th century). A weakening (not yet secession) in copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas could have brought about a slow decline of the Tel Masos chiefdom. This process could have been accelerated by the retreat of Egypt, if this happened in the early 9th century during or after the reign of Osorkon I.

After the decline of Egyptian involvement in the Levant the copper trade was probably dominated by a local power, such as the city of Gath, which grew at that time to become the largest urban centre in the country (Uziel and Maeir 2005). A stronger contender could have been the Northern Kingdom under the Omride dynasty—the most powerful territorial entity in the region at that time. In fact, control over the southern routes could have been exerted by an Omride–Gath alliance, which, in the days of Osorkon II, could have been backed by Egypt.

The first fortified administrative centre at Tel Beersheba (Stratum V) and the first fort at Arad (Stratum XI)—both dating to the Late Iron IIA (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 275) which is best represented by the rich assemblage of Stratum 4 at Tell es-Safi—signify the initial step in state-formation in Judah and its earliest expansion into the Beersheba Valley, where they replaced the Tel Masos chiefdom system. The question is whether this happened before or after the fall of Gath in the second half of the 9th century BCE.

The Omride state expanded in almost all directions (Timm 1982; Miller and Hayes 1986: 250–288; Finkelstein and Na’aman 2005). There can be no doubt that in the south it had the power to take over the marginal, demographically depleted Kingdom of Judah. But in this case the Omrides opted for military and political cooperation backed by diplomatic marriage (of Jehoram and Athaliah); instead of deposing the Davidic dynasty, they probably attempted to take it over from within. This was not an act between equal entities, such as the relationship between Israel and the Phoenicians, but rather an attempt at sheer dominance by the Northern Kingdom over the small client-state to its south (see also Donner 1977: 391; Knauf 2000: 81). Both the biblical text and the Dan Inscription testify that the Judahite kings served the military ambitions of the Omrides.

The first alternative to understanding the construction of Beersheba V and Arad XI is that it represents an effort by Judah, under the auspices of the Omrides, to take control over the trade routes in the Beersheba Valley after the decline of the Tel Masos chiefdom. The construction of two Omride forts in Ataroth and Jahaz in northern Moab, referred to in the Mesha Inscription, should possibly be seen as
part of the same effort by the Northern Kingdom to exert its influence in the south. Recent excavations at Khirbet Medeineh eth-Thamed (e.g., Daviau 1997)—the most probable location of Jahaz (Dearman 1984)—revealed evidence for typical Omride-like construction methods (Finkelstein 2000: 127–128). Omride southern expansion in Transjordan (also hinted at in 2 Kings 1: 1), may have been linked to their interest in the (dwindling) Arabah copper production. The close trade relationship between the Omrides and Phoenicia is attested in both the archaeological and biblical records. The Omrides must have been rewarded from the revival of copper supply from Cyprus to the Levant. Whether they were interested in preserving production in the Arabah, too, or took steps to strangle the Arabah industry, is difficult to say.

Two biblical references may provide a vague memory of Omride activity in the south; both are related to King Ahaziah, who ruled in the years 852–851 BCE. The first is his call on Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron (2 Kings 2). Some scholars see this story, or parts of it, as a secondary, post-Deuteronomistic insertion (e.g., Rofé 1988: 34; Long 1991: 16; White 1997: 31). Rofé’s proposal, that the story was inserted into the Book of Kings in post-exilic times (1988: 35–40; see also McKenzie 1991: 91–92), has been rejected by other scholars (e.g., Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 28). Though a place named Accaron is mentioned in the Hellenistic period (Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 56), Tel Miqne (Ekron) was not inhabited after the early 6th century (Dothan and Gitin 1993: 1056–1058). It is thus difficult to understand this narrative against a post-exilic background. Other scholars interpret the story as pre-Deuteronomistic (e.g., Thiel 1991: 156–158; Na’aman 1997b: 160–161; for the unity of the narrative see Begg 1985) and therefore more of historical value. The second reference is Ahaziah’s offer to participate in Judah’s Red Sea trade (1 Kings 22: 49), which Miller and Hayes (1986: 279) saw as evidence for Omride commercial activity in the south.

According to this scenario, dating the construction of Beersheba V and Arad XI to the mid-9th century or a bit earlier would fit what we know about the Late Iron IIA from Tell es-Safi. The construction of two Judahite forts in the Shephelah—Lachish IV and Beth-shemesh IIa—could have also been part of this Judahite-under-Omride expansion. Needless to say, such southward and especially westward expansion could not have been achieved without the cooperation of Gath.

Another possibility is that Judahite expansion to the Beersheba Valley and the Shephelah occurred after the fall of Gath.

Hazael

In the second half of the 9th century, Aram Damascus replaced Israel as the most powerful state in the region. In ca. 840 BCE the Northern Kingdom was defeated by Hazael, its northeastern territories were taken and many of the sites in the northern
valleys were destroyed (Na’aman 1997a). The effective rule of the kings of Samaria was restricted to the northern highlands. Hazael continued his push further south, besieged Gath and destroyed it (Maeir 2004). For a while Aram Damascus dominated the lowlands of Israel—the northern valleys and the Coastal Plain combined. The story in 2 Kings 12: 18 seems to indicate that Judah paid tribute to Damascus and became a vassal of Hazael. As a result Judah was not attacked.

Hazael’s policies were connected to developments in Phoenicia. The initial steps of Phoenician colonial expansion in the West took place in the second half of the 9th century. We refer to the establishment at Kition (Guzzo Amadasi and Karageorghis 1977: 7; Yon 1997) and to evidence from new radiocarbon dating from Carthage (Docter et al. forthcoming; Nijboer forthcoming) and southern Spain (Aubet 2001: 372–381; Torres 1998; 2005). It has been suggested to link the Phoenician westward expansion during the 8th−7th centuries BCE to their role as commercial agents for the Assyrian Empire (Frankenstein 1979). Recently, one of us proposed that this process, which eventually transformed the Phoenicians into pan-Mediterranean traders, started in the days of Hazael (Fantalkin forthcoming). According to this reconstruction the Phoenician expansion in the late 9th century served the trade ambitions of Aram Damascus. Hazael, therefore, appears to have been a major player in the renewal of trade relations between Cyprus and the Phoenician coast.

Hazael’s campaign to Philistia should be seen in this perspective. His interest was probably to monopolize the Cypro-Phoenician copper trade by weakening the flow of the competing southern copper. This could have been the reason for his assault on Gath after diminishing the power of Israel. And this could have been the cause for the decline of the copper industry in the south. As a result of the campaign, production at Khirbet en-Nahas, which must have been low already, ceased entirely. Indeed, most 14C readings from the site do not go beyond 835–825 BCE (Levy et al. 2005: 135; before ca. 835 in Area A—Higham et al. 2005: 172; “Towards the end of the 9th century BCE, activity in both areas ceased”—ibid.: 177). It seems that from now on, until the revival of copper industry in the Arabah in the late 8th century under Assyrian domination (Knauf and Lenzen 1987), most if not all Levantine copper came from Cyprus.

This is also the second alternative for the expansion of Judah to the Shephelah and the Beersheba Valley. Both could have taken place after the fall of Gath, with the consent of Hazael. According to this scenario, Judah was liberated from the influence of the Omrides only to serve the interests of Damascus in the region. But of course, the drive to the south could have taken place somewhat earlier than the expansion to the West; the minute dating of the four Judahite centres under discussion—Beersheba V, Arad XI, Lachish IV and Beth-shemesh IIa—within the Late Iron IIA remains an open matter.
In any event, there is no need to seek the centre of the growing Judahite state in the Shephelah (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004: 233). In Jerusalem, too, public building activity is evident for the first time in the Late Iron IIA, parallel to the expansion of Judah to the south and west. The Stepped Stone Structure should probably be dated to this period (Finkelstein 2001) and it seems that the same holds true for the large building recently unearthed in the City of David, above and slightly to the north of the Stepped Stone Structure (E. Mazar 2006); the fill under the foundations of this building yielded Iron IIA pottery (note the Black on Red juglet in E. Mazar 2006; for this matter see Finkelstein, Fantalkin and Piasezky forthcoming). The Late Iron IIA bullae recently found in the City of David (Reich Shuqron and Lernau forthcoming) also indicate a growing administrative activity in Jerusalem ca. 800 BCE.

The next step to full-blown statehood taken by Judah is characterized by the transition from the Lachish IV to the Lachish III pottery phases, that is, from the Late Iron IIA to the Iron IIB. As we have seen, this transition probably occurred around 800 BCE. It should probably be related to Judah’s return to the sphere of influence of the Northern Kingdom, in the days of Joash and Jeroboam II. At that time Israel prospered (and expanded territorially) as a client state of the great Assyrian Empire. There are several indications of renewed involvement by Israel in the south, in territories that had previously been dominated by Hazael. The first is the strong northern features in the material culture and inscriptions of Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Beck 1982; Lemaire 1984; Ayalon 1995: 192–195; Gunneweg, Perlman and Meshel 1985: 270–272), located on one of the desert trade-routes. The second is the possible association of the Northern Kingdom with transportation of Egyptian horses to Assyria (Cantrell and Finkelstein forthcoming). Israel must have acted in these territories to serve Assyrian economic interests. Adadnirari III’s claim in the Calah Inscription (ANET: 282) of control over the entire country including the south—from Edom to Philistia—should probably be seen in this light.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article we revisited the question of the Iron I–IIA in Judah and the south (following Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004). Our proposals:

(1) Breaking the linkage between the Sheshonq I campaign and the abandonment of the Tel Masos settlement system, including Arad XII, and instead setting the date for the beginning of the Iron IIA in the south to the late 10th century.

(2) Dating the transition from the Early to the Late Iron IIA sometime in the first half of the 9th century BCE.

(3) Eliminating the idea that the transition from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB in Judah
was an outcome of the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1: 1. We suggest dating the end of the Iron IIA to ca. 800 BCE.

By lowering the beginning of the Early Iron IIA and raising the end of the Late Iron IIA we get an Iron IIA period of ca. 125 years—shorter than the ca. 200 years suggested by Herzog and Singer-Avitz (2004).

In historical terms we have established a link between the two southern phenomena—the Tel Masos chiefdom and the copper production centre of Khirbet en-Naḥas. We propose that their main phase of prosperity was the result of the Sheshonq I campaign. We suggest the southern lowlands were dominated consecutively by Egypt of the 22nd dynasty in the second half of the 10th century; the Northern Kingdom of the days of the Omride Dynasty in the first half of the 9th century; Hazael of Aram Damascus in the second half of the 9th century; and again by the Northern Kingdom under Assyrian hegemony in the first half of the 8th century BCE.

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