THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND BEHIND THE OLD ISRAELITE ARK NARRATIVE*

I. The Ark Narrative

The idea that 1 Sam 4,1 – 7,1* and 2 Samuel 6* constitute an independent Ark Narrative comes from Leonhard Rost [1]. In his book about the origin of David's succession history, he argued that there were other independent narratives in the books of Samuel about David's rise and the Ark of Yhwh. According to him, the latter, which had been transmitted and written down independently from the David narratives, recounted how the Ark was captured by the Philistines and then made its way back to Israelite territory, first to Beth-shemesh and from there to Kiriath-jearim, before David brought it to Jerusalem. Rost postulated that this narrative had been written by an "eye witness", a priest of the Ark during the reign of David or Solomon. According to him, the narrative is characterized by a specific vocabulary, style (many speeches and questions) and theological stance. Yhwh is presented as a god who strikes his enemies and brings salvation to his people. Rost's hypothesis was accepted by many scholars, including Martin Noth [2] and Kyle McCarter [3], who assumed that the Dtr integrated this old tradition in his account about Samuel and the origins of the monarchy.

There have also been critical voices against Rost's theory. The first problem is that the part about David's transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem, ostensibly the heart of the story, is separated from the main block of the narrative. Moreover, the story of 2 Samuel 6 is quite different from 1 Samuel 4–6 and does not fit as a direct continuation of 1 Sam 7,1:

[1] L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT 42; Stuttgart 1926). According to Rost, the story contained 1 Sam 4,1b-18a.19-21; 5,11-11b$_1$.12; 6,1-3b$_1$.4.10-14.16.19 – 7,1; 2 Sam 6,1-15.17-20a.

[2] M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield 1991) 77 and 86.

[3] P.K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, NY 1980) 23-26.

- David appears in 2 Samuel 6 without any introduction.
- The names differ: 1 Sam 7,1 mentions Eleazar as Abinadab's son, while 2 Samuel 6 speaks about Uzzah and Ahio; 2 Sam 7,1 has Kiriath-jearim, whereas 2 Samuel 6 refers to Baale Yehuda (MT; which can be understood as "the lords of Judah") or Baalah (according to 4 Q Sam[a]: "to Baalah [4], that is Kiria[th-jearim, which belongs] to Judah" [5]).
- In 1 Sam 4,1b – 7,1 the Ark seems to be identified with YHWH or a statue of YHWH. It acts directly by destroying the statue of Dagon and by inflicting plagues on the Philistines, while in most parts of 2 Samuel 6 the Ark is more of a cultic symbol that needs to be brought to Jerusalem.
- The style and vocabulary of 1 Sam 4,1b – 7,1, on the one hand, and of 2 Samuel 6, on the other, are quite different. The two units share only 4 of the 54 words and expressions which Rost considered to be typical of the so-called Ark Narrative [6].
- 1 Sam 4,1b – 7,1 does not hint at Jerusalem as the final destination of the Ark, which would be logical had the narrative been the *hieros logos* of an Ark shrine in the Jerusalem temple.

For these reasons some authors challenged the idea that 2 Samuel 6 was the end of an independent Ark narrative [7]. We agree with them and treat 1 Sam 4,1 – 7,1 and 2 Samuel 6 as separate documents of different origin and date [8]. We see the former as an old North Israelite text and the latter as a later Deuteronomistic Judahite tale.

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[4] Baalah may be the original reading here. See the careful discussion in I. HIMBAZA, "Critique textuelle et critique littéraire en 2 Samuel 6,2: Une généalogie des témoins textuels," *Bib* 97 (2016) 440-453.

[5] On the different names of the town in the biblical text, see I. FINKELSTEIN – T. RÖMER, "Kiriath-jearim, Kiriath-baal/Baalah, Gibeah: A Geographical-History Challenge", *Writing, Rewriting and Overwriting in the Books of Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets*. Essays in Honor of Cynthia Edenburg (eds. I. KOCH – T. RÖMER – O. SERGI) (BETL 304; Leuven 2019) 211-222.

[6] C. SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER, "Beobachtungen zur Ladegeschichte und zur Komposition der Samuelbücher", *Freiheit und Recht*. Festschrift für Frank Crüsemann zum 65. Geburtstag (eds. C. HARDMEIER – R. KESSLER – A. RUWE) (Gütersloh 1995) 323-338, here 328.

[7] F. SCHICKLBERGER, *Die Ladeerzählungen des ersten Samuel-Buches*. Eine literatur-wissenschaftliche und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung (FzB 7; Würzburg 1973); P.D. MILLER – J.J.M. ROBERTS, *The Hand of the Lord*. A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel (Baltimore, MD 1977); P. PORZIG, *Die Lade Jahwes im Alten Testament und in den Texten vom Toten Meer* (BZAW 397; Berlin 2009).

[8] The book of Chronicles only takes over the story of the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 13) because it starts its narration with David. For a comparison between 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 see A.G. AULD, *I & II Samuel*. A Commentary (OTL; Louisville, KY 2011) 410-412, and R. REZETKO, *Source and Revision in the Narratives of David's Transfer of the Ark*. Text, Language, and Story in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15–16 (LHB/OTS 470; New York 2007).

II. THE OLD NORTH ISRAELITE TEXT

Let us now turn to the original, pre-dtr Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4,1b – 7,1. The Ark is presented as a portable shrine, which YHWH can leave in order to defend his people against their enemies. Its original name was either Ark of Elohim [9] or Ark of YHWH; there are frequent differences in the renderings of the MT and the LXX. "Ark of the God of Israel" appears in chapters 5 and 6 in the mouth of the Philistines [10]. The questions to ask are: Where did this old Ark Narrative come from? When was it composed and why? What is the message behind the story?

Regarding "where", the Bible does not say how the Ark would have come to Shiloh after the conquest of the Land. This seems to indicate that we have here an independent tradition connected to the sanctuary of Shiloh [11]. The original location of the Ark there hints that the story comes from the Northern Kingdom. And as the essence of the original story is the transfer of the Ark from Shiloh to Kiriath-jearim, the location of the latter town is evidently of importance. In the border lists in the book of Joshua, the town is mentioned as a point on the border between the tribal territories of Benjamin and Judah (Josh 15,9; 18,15), while in the lists of towns it appears in both Benjamin (Josh 18,28) and Judah (Josh 15,60). Belonging to the House of Joseph, Benjamin was considered the southernmost of the Northern tribes (and hence its name) and its territory — at least most of it — was probably under the hegemony of Israel until the middle of the ninth century. In the late ninth century BCE (when Damascus oppressed Israel) it may have switched hands to Judah, but immediately thereafter it returned to the rule of Israel, and after 722 BCE to Assyria. With the withdrawal of Assyria from the Levant and the expansion of the Southern

[9] Whether the original name of the Ark was "the Ark" or "the Ark of God [elohîm]", the identity of the deity which it represents remains open. Theoretically it could have been an "Ark of El", which was later attributed to YHWH. However, in the oldest narrative that we can reconstruct, it is clear that it is the Ark of YHWH.

[10] The Greek versions and the MT of the Ark Narrative differ enormously, and it is not always easy to decide which textual tradition has the original reading. For a discussion of the main differences, see B. GRILLET – M. LESTIENNE, *Premier Livre des Règnes* (La Bible d'Alexandrie 9/1; Paris 1997), and R. WIRTH, *Die Septuaginta der Samuelbücher*. Untersucht unter Einbeziehung ihrer Rezensionen (De Septuaginta Investigationes 7; Göttingen 2016). In this article we cannot discuss all the differences between the Greek versions and the MT. It is, however, quite clear that the LXX of the Ark Narrative depends on a different Hebrew version than the MT, which in some cases preserves the older account (see also the text-critical remarks in W. DIETRICH, *1 Samuel 1–12* [BK.AT VIII/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2010] *passim*).

[11] Very late priestly texts at the end of the book of Joshua speak of a gathering of the people around the tabernacle at Shiloh (cf. Josh 18,1), but even these texts, which probably aim at creating a link with the following story, do not mention the Ark.

Kingdom to the area of Bethel in the days of Josiah, in the late seventh century BCE, Benjamin became part of Judah [12]. The transfer of the Shilonite Ark to a border town between Israel and Judah must be significant in the story, a point to which we will return later.

This brings us to the "when" and "why" questions. If the story is pre-dtr and if it comes from the North, it is only logical to associate it with Israel before the Assyrian takeover. But when in the history of the Northern Kingdom? In view of what we know today about the development of writing elaborate texts in the Hebrew kingdoms, it seems that ca. 800 BCE would be the earliest possible date for the composition. This is the first time when the epigraphic evidence — the Tell Deir 'Alla inscription and Inscription 4.2 from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (both associated with Israel) — shows the ability to compose literary texts [13]. This would place the time of the first written version of the Ark narrative between 800 and 720 BCE. In order to ask when during this period the Ark Narrative was put in writing and also to address the question of the goals behind it, we need to turn to the archaeology and history of the sites mentioned in the text.

In order to know which sites should be discussed, we must remember that the original, old Ark Narrative does not encompass the entire text of 1 Sam 4,1 – 7,1 (Rost already identified later inserts in it) [14]. The differences between the MT and LXX also betray a very complex redaction history [15]. The later redactions (which can be qualified as "dtr" and "post-dtr") include especially:

• The verses that create a link with the plague narratives in the Exodus tradition; this is especially the case in 1 Sam 4,8-9a.19-22 [16].

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[12] On the territorial affiliation of Benjamin in the history of the two Hebrew kingdoms, see I. FINKELSTEIN, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel': An Alternative View", *ZAW* 123 (2011) 348-367, *contra* N. NA'AMAN. "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel'", *ZAW* 121 (2009) 211-224, 335-349.

[13] E. BLUM, "Institutionelle und kulturelle Voraussetzungen der israelitischen Traditionsliteratur", *Tradition(en) im alten Israel*. Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation (eds. R. EBACH – M. LEUENBERGER) (FAT 127; Tübingen 2019) 3-44, here 34-35, who based on the same data concludes that Deir 'Alla and Kuntillet 'Ajrud presuppose the existence of scribal skills much earlier. This debate depends also on how much "historical value" is given to the biblical account of the origins of the monarchy, which in our view is highly ideological. There are no archaeological indications of an organized and centralized monarchy before the Omrides; for details see I. FINKELSTEIN – N.A. SILBERMAN, *David and Solomon*. In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition (New York 2006).

[14] See T. RÖMER, "Katastrophengeschichte oder Kultgründungslegende? Gedanken zur Funktion der ursprünglichen Ladeerzählung", *Eigensinn und Entstehung der Hebräischen Bibel*. Erhard Blum zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (eds. J.J. KRAUSE – W. OSWALD – K. WEINGART) (Tübingen 2020) 211-221.

[15] See above, footnote 10.

[16] For the diachronic arguments see RÖMER, "Katastrophengeschichte", 266.

- The mention of the Levites in 6,15 [17].
- The use of the Deuteronomistic "to this day" in 5,5 and 6,18, and the elements associated with it — threshold of Dagon at Ashdod and the big stone at Beth-shemesh.
- The references to the *ofalim* and *tehorim* (and their images) and to the golden mice (see Deut 28,27, where *ofalim* is related to the Exodus tradition).
- The references to the *seranim* of the Philistines, hinting at the Deuteronomistic idea of a Philistine Pentapolis. This is clearly a later construction since the Ark does not travel to five Philistine cities. Also note that *seranim* is a word loaned from Greek, which fits a seventh-sixth centuries BCE setting, hardly earlier [18].
- The Ichabod verses (4,19-22), which are clearly out of order and try to suggest a continuity of the Elide line [19].
- Yнwн of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim [20].
- The reference to the sons of Eli by name [21].
- The presentation of Eli as a judge (4,18b), which tries to integrate the story in the context of the first part of the book of Samuel.

If the references to the *seranim* are Deuteronomistic, the mention of Gath and Ekron must be, too. Note that Gath was not an important place in the eighth century. It was destroyed by Hazael in the second half of the ninth century and never fully recovered [22]. In the late eighth century

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[17] The names in 1 Sam 7,1, which recall Aaronide names, may also belong to a later Levitical redaction, but this is difficult to determine.

[18] Summary in I. Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective", *JSOT* 27 (2002) 131-167.

[19] See also Porzig, *Die Lade Jahwes*, 140-141, and Römer, "Katastrophenerzählung", 267. This insertion presupposes 1 Sam 2,27-36. It belongs together with 1 Sam 12,4 and 22,9.20. These verses try to construct the priest Abiathar as an Elide of the fourth generation. The name Ichabod is an allusion to the loss of the divine glory (*kabod*) and makes sense after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

[20] This title presuppose the Jerusalemite cult and was added by the same redactors that were responsible for the composition of the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6.

[21] These names appear, except for 1 Samuel 4, only in 1 Sam 1,3 and 2,34, but not in the passages 2 Sam 2,12-17 and 2,22-26, which criticize Eli's sons. In 4,4.11.17 these names are not placed directly after "sons", but instead are separated from this lexeme by verbs or objects, which already indicates the integration of a gloss. Note also that these names do not appear in 4,17 LXX. They were therefore given in a quite late stage. For the later naming of secondary characters, see also the Chronicler in regard to his sources in Samuel–Kings; for examples, see I. Kalimi, *Zur Geschichtsschreibung des Chronisten. Literarisch-historigraphische Abweichungen der Chronik von ihren Paralleltexten in den Samuel- und Königsbüchern* (BZAW 226; Berlin – New York 1995) 70-72.

[22] A.M. Maeir, "Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project 1996-2010: Introduction, Overview and Synopsis of Results", *Tell es-Safi/Gath I: The 1996-2005 Seasons*. Volume I: Text (ed. A.M. Maeir) (ÄAT 69; Wiesbaden 2012) 1-89.

Sargon II refers to Gath as a secondary town in the territory of Ashdod [23].
It is absent from late-monarchic (or later) prophetic references to the cities
of Philistia. Ekron was a prominent place in the Iron I; it is referred to
in the Sennacherib 701 BCE annals though at that time it covered the
upper mound only, a relatively small area. In Iron IIC, in the seventh cen-
tury BCE, it once again grew to become the largest city in the Shephelah [24].
This means that Gath and Ekron were probably added to the original Ark
Narrative by dtr redactors as the two Philistine towns bordering on Judah.
If so, the old story would have recounted the trip of the Ark from Ashdod
directly to Beth-shemesh. This leaves us with five important places in
the old Ark Narrative that need to be dealt with: Shiloh, Aphek, Ashdod,
Beth-shemesh and Kiriath-jearim [25].

We are left, then, with the following narrative, which is brought here as
no more than an illustration of what the old text could have looked like [26]:

> *1 Sam 4 [1] In those days the Philistines mustered for war against Israel, and
> Israel went out to battle against them; they encamped at Ebenezer, and the
> Philistines encamped at Aphek [27]. [2] The Philistines drew up in line against
> Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines,
> who slew about four thousand men on the field of battle. [3] And when
> the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has Y*HWH* put
> us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of Y*HWH* [28] here
> from Shiloh, that he may come among us and save us from the power of our
> enemies". [4] So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark*

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[23] N. NA'AMAN, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography*. The First Temple Period
(Winona Lake, IN 2006) 40.

[24] T. DOTHAN – S. GITIN, "Miqne, Tel (Ekron)", *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeologi-
cal Excavations in the Holy Land*. 5. Supplementary Volume (ed. E. STERN) (Jerusalem –
Washington, DC 2008).

[25] There is no way to identify Eben-ezer. The proposal to equate it with Izbet Sartah,
located on a hill three km east of Aphek (M. KOCHAVI, "An Ostracon of the Period of the
Judges from 'Izbet Sartah", *TA* 4 [1977] 1-13, here 3) stemmed from the now outdated
notion that the story in 1 Samuel 4 should be understood in terms of an Iron I background.

[26] Unlike some of our colleagues we do not think that it is possible to reconstruct the
"Urtext" in every detail. We must take into consideration that later redactors do not only
add words and passages; they can also alter and omit passages from the text that they are
revising. The idea that the original text is always preserved depends on the anachronistic
assumption that it had already acquired a "sacred" status.

[27] According to LXX. The Greek text does not mention Samuel, which is another indi-
cation that the MT's version of 1 Sam 4,1 ("And the word of Samuel came to all Israel")
is a later revision. In contrast to the Greek version, the MT attributes the initiative of the
battle to the Israelites. This may be understood as a theological modification in order to
explain that the Israelites lost the battle and the Ark because they had not consulted YHWH
before waging war. Another option would be to consider this introduction as having been
lost in the MT by homoioteleuton; see further R.W. KLEIN, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, TX,
1983) 37.

[28] Following LXX[B]. In the old story the Ark was not yet the "ark of the covenant",
but the Ark, the Ark of YHWH, or the Ark of god (Elohim).

*of Y*HWH. *The two sons of Eli were there with the ark* [29]. *[5] When the ark of Y*HWH *came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. [6] And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of Y*HWH *had come to the camp, [7] the Philistines were afraid; for they said, "A god [elohim] has come into the camp". And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before". [10] So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home; and the slaughter was very big, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot-soldiers. [11] And the ark of Elohim was captured. And the two sons of Eli died. [12] A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head. [13] When he arrived, Eli was sitting upon his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of Elohim. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. [14] When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hastened and came and told Eli. [15] Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set, so that he could not see. [16] And the man said to Eli, "I am the one who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today". And he said, "How did it go, my son?" [17] He who brought the tidings answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the people; your two sons also are dead, and the ark of Elohim has been captured". [18] When he mentioned the ark of Elohim, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy.*

***1 Sam 5** [1] The Philistines had captured the ark of Elohim, and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; [2] then the Philistines took the ark of Elohim* [30] *and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. [3] And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of Y*HWH. *So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. [4] But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of Y*HWH, *and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. [7] And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the god [elohei] of Israel must not remain with us; for his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god". [8] So they said, "What shall we do with the ark of the god [elohei] of Israel?" [11] For there was a heavy panic* [31] *throughout the whole city, since the ark of the god [of Israel] had come there* [32].

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[29] According to LXX, which has only "ark" here.

[30] LXX has "ark of Y"HWH".

[31] MT adds "deathly".

[32] According to LXX; see also the reconstruction in 4 Sam^a, col. VI, which should only read "ark of the god"; cf. E.C. ULRICH (ed.), *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls. Transcriptions and Textual Variants. Volume I: Genesis–Kings* (Leiden – Boston, MA 2013) 266. MT has changed the text to "the hand of god [elohim] was very heavy there". Verse 12 is a doublet to v. 11; "the cry of the city" apparently creates a parallel to Exod 2,23.

1 Sam 6 [2 [33]*] And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of YHWH? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place". [3] They said, "If you send away the ark of the god [elohei] of Israel, do not send it empty [5] and give glory to the god [elohei] of Israel; so that* [34] *he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land* [35]*. [7] Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows upon which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. [8] And take the ark of YHWH and place it on the cart and place golden objects next to it; then send it off, and let it go its way"* [36]*. [10] The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. [12] And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went; they turned neither to the right nor to the left. [13] Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark of YHWH* [37]*, they rejoiced to see it* [38]*. [19] But he [YHWH] slew among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of YHWH; [20] The men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before YHWH, this holy God? And to whom shall the ark of YHWH* [39] *go away from us?" [21] So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of YHWH. Come down and take it up to you".*

1 Sam 7 [1] And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of YHWH, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill; and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to have charge of the ark of YHWH.

As read today in the biblical sequence, the story ostensibly deals with pre-monarchic times (in other words, this was the way the dtr redactors wanted their addressees to read it; indeed, this is how Rost and others understood it). Yet, separating the old Ark Narrative from the Samuel tradition and from the story of David in 2 Samuel 6 unchains the reader from this limitation.

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[33] 1 Sam 6,1 is probably an insert: "L'indication sur la durée du séjour de l'arche vient interrompre une narration où 6.2 pourrait être la suite" (A. CAQUOT – Ph. DE ROBERT, *Les livres de Samuel* [CAT VI; Geneva 1994] 94). The author of this addition wanted to indicate that the Ark did not stay for a very long time in Philistine territory. Flavius Josephus (*Ant*. VI, 18) even shortens the stay to four months.

[34] MT: "perhaps".

[35] The "hardening of the heart" in v. 6 also belongs to an "Exodus revision".

[36] Verse 9 introduces an ordeal of sorts that does not fit within its context. The mention of Beth-shemesh anticipates the narration as if the Philistines knew already that the Ark will travel there.

[37] Following LXX; MT has only "ark".

[38] The episode in 6,14-18 interrupts the narrative and may have been added in order to explain why YHWH struck the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh. In the present context v. 19 comes somewhat unexpectedly. Maybe the author of 6,14-18 wanted to show that the "holy place" of Beth-shemesh is not a legitimate place for the Ark.

[39] According to LXX. The MT refers the question to YHWH himself.

III. Archaeological And Historical Considerations

In what follows, we deal mainly with the Iron Age. It would be logical to treat the five sites according to the sequence of events in the story, from Shiloh to Kiriath-jearim. However, it also makes sense to start with Kiriath-jearim. First, the essence of the old Northern Ark Narrative is the transfer of the ark to this place, providing a *hieros logos* for the temple of the ark there. Second, and no less important, our recent excavations at the site provide the chronological framework for the discussion.

1. *Kiriath-jearim*

Kiriath-jearim is securely identified with the mound of Deir el-ᶜAzar above the village of Abu Ghosh, 13 km west-northwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. This is a commanding place, dominating one of the main ancient routes to Jerusalem [40]. We carried out two excavation seasons at the site in 2017 and 2019 [41].

A salvage excavation at the summit of the hill in the mid-1990s [42], two intensive field surveys (one carried out in the 1980s and the other more recently) and our current project offer a coherent picture of the settlement history of the site [43]: continued habitation of low intensity in the Bronze Age, Iron I and Iron IIA (ninth century BCE), peak activity in the Iron IIB-C (from the early eighth century to the beginning of the sixth century BCE) and again low intensity in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods [44].

In the Iron IIB, the summit of the hill was shaped artificially: massive stone support walls were constructed on all sides. We unearthed the northern and eastern walls; the southern wall was detected by a ground-penetrating radar investigation and the western wall was cached in a very prominent terrace seen on the surface. An earth fill was laid between

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[40] For the identification and names of the site in the Bible, see Finkelstein – Römer, "Kiriath-jearim".

[41] For a preliminary report on the first season, see I. Finkelstein – T. Römer – C. Nicolle – Z.C. Dunseth – A. Kleiman – J. Mas – N. Porat, "Excavations at Kiriath-jearim near Jerusalem, 2017: Preliminary Report", *Sem* 60 (2018) 31-83.

[42] C. McKinny – O. Schwartz – G. Barkay – A. Fantalkin – B. Zissu, "Kiriath-Jearim (Deir el 'Azar): Archaeological Investigations of a Biblical Town in the Judaean Hill Country", *IEJ* 68 (2018) 30-49.

[43] Finkelstein – Römer – Nicolle – Dunseth – Kleiman – Mas – Porat, "Excavations at Kiriath-jearim", table 1.

[44] For later periods, see I. Finkelstein – T. Römer, "Kiriath-jearim and the List of Bacchides Forts in 1 Maccabees 9:50-52", *New Studies in the Archeology of Jerusalem and its Region* XIII (eds. O. Peleg-Barkat – Y. Zelinger – J. Uziel – Y. Gadot) (Jerusalem 2019) *7-17.

the support walls and the natural slope, creating a monumental platform/compound on the summit, 150 × 110 m in size, oriented exactly north-south and east-west. Pottery evidence from the massive support wall in the north and Optical Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating of samples from the support walls in the east indicate that the platform was constructed in the early phase of the Iron IIB, in the first half of the eighth century BCE.

A monumental platform like this must have been constructed by a central power. Three possibilities come to mind: Judah, Assyria and Israel, but only the last option can really fit the historical situation. In the early eighth century BCE Judah did not have the economic or demographic resources to engage in grand-scale monumental construction [45], and, indeed, there is no parallel to this type of platform in the territory of the kingdom. It seems that Assyria did construct a ruling compound of a somewhat similar type in Buseirah in Edom [46]. One might theorize that an Assyrian administrative/military center was established at Kiriath-jearim in order to dominate Jerusalem and its surroundings after the Sennacherib campaign in 701 BCE. However, the date of construction of the monumental platform in the early eighth century BCE is too early for this scenario (also for a somewhat earlier Assyrian endeavor). For these reasons, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, seems the most plausible candidate. Indeed, monumental platforms/compounds of this type are known in the territory of Israel, for instance in its capital Samaria [47] and at Jezreel in Cisjordan and at Khirbet Mudeineh eth-Themed (the location of biblical Jahaz) and Khirbet Atarus (Ataroth) in Transjordan (both places are mentioned as Israelite forts in the Mesha inscription [48]). Affiliating the monumental platform of the early eighth century BCE at Kiriath-jearim with Israel should come as no surprise: in the days of Jeroboam II (ca. 788-747 BCE) Israel reached its peak territorial expansion, demographic growth and economic prosperity; in Jeroboam's time Kiriath-jearim was located on the southern border of Israel (see above).

The center of the Iron Age compound cannot be explored because of the modern convent and church located there. In addition, the salvage excavations undertaken at the summit in the 1990s revealed bedrock close to

[45] For the demography and settlement patterns, see I. FINKELSTEIN – N.A. SILBERMAN, "Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology", *JSOT* 30 (2006) 259-285.

[46] See the aerial photograph in P. BIENKOWSKI, *Busayra*. Excavations by Crystal-M. Bennett 1971-1980 (Oxford 2002) 38.

[47] I. FINKELSTEIN, "Observations on the Layout of Iron Age Samaria", *TA* 38 (2011) 194-207.

[48] I. FINKELSTEIN – O. LIPSCHITS, "Omride Architecture in Moab: Jahaz and Ataroth", *ZDPV* 126 (2010) 29-42.

the surface [49], while a geodetic/seismic investigation conducted for us by a team from the Hebrew University indicated deep fills behind the support walls. Moreover, close to the support walls preservation is below the level of the Iron Age floors. In view of these factors, there is no way to explore what was built on the surface of the platform. Looking at comparable places such as Samaria and the sites east of the Dead Sea, one can think about at least one major administration center and a temple (more below). One possible clue about the monumental size of such buildings is given by the ashlar blocks found in secondary use in a Roman period renovation of the great support wall in the east. Blocks like this appear in our region in three periods: the Iron Age IIA-B (mainly in the North), the Hasmonean phase of the Hellenistic period (starting in the late second century BCE) and the early Roman period. Since the blocks are reused in an early Roman wall, and as the ceramic repertoire seems to indicate that Hellenistic activity at the site is pre-Hasmonean, it is reasonable to associate these ashlar blocks with Iron Age buildings that stood in the compound on the summit of the hill.

2. *Shiloh*

Excavations by one of us at Shiloh in the early 1980s revealed evidence of strong activity with major architectural remains in the Middle Bronze and the Iron I, and low-intensity activity in the Late Bronze and Iron II [50].

A monumental compound was built at the site in the Middle Bronze III, with support walls and fills that shaped the hill artificially; no evidence of habitation quarters could be detected. A Late Bronze IIA (fourteenth century BCE) *favissa* of ceramic offering vessels, some found with animal bones inside, was exposed in the northeastern sector of the site, probably representing refuse of a cult place that stood at the summit of the hill; no other Late Bronze remains could be found in our excavation areas on the periphery of the summit, and only a few sherds came up in mixed loci (also in the old Danish excavation).

Shiloh features remains of an exceptionally large Iron I site. The main finds were a system of well-built pillared storehouses on the upper western slope and a number of stone-lined silos in the north and northeast sectors. The excavations did not unearth Iron I habitation buildings. Evidence of cult activity was slim, but considering the architectural remains, the similarity to the nature of the site in the Middle Bronze, and the Late

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[49] McKinny – Schwartz – Barkay – Fantalkin – Zissu, "Kiriath-Jearim".
[50] I. Finkelstein (ed.), *Shiloh. The Archaeology of a Biblical Site* (MSIA 10; Tel Aviv 1993).

Bronze *favissa* of cult refuse, it is possible to postulate even without relying on the biblical record that Shiloh was a temple-site and that the storehouses on the slope served a temple that probably stood at the summit of the mound [51]. Yet, there is no point in looking for the Bronze and Iron Age remains on the summit, as it was badly eroded in later centuries, to the point that bedrock is exposed on the surface, or immediately under Roman, Byzantine and Medieval remains. One of us has recently raised the possibility that in both the Middle Bronze III and Iron I Shiloh was a temple site of a Shechem-centered territorial entity [52].

The Iron I site was destroyed in a major conflagration, also detected in the course of the Danish excavations [53]. Over 20 years after the renewed dig, short-lived samples from the devastation radiocarbon-dated it to the second half of the eleventh century BCE [54].

Both the Danish excavations in the 1920s and 1930s and the dig in the 1980s revealed only poor remains from the Iron II. The small number of sherds that were published date mostly to the Iron IIB [55]. Fragmentary Iron IIB remains were traced by Yeivin [56] on the flat natural platform located immediately to the north of the mound.

Recent excavations at Shiloh brought to light three important pieces of information that facilitate better understanding of the history and nature of the site in the Iron Age:

(1) Additional evidence of storehouses destroyed in a fierce conflagration was unearthed in the southeastern lower sector of the site. This indicates that Iron I Shiloh was larger than thought before; it could have reached an area of up to 2.5 hectares, an exceptionally big site for the

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[51] C.W. WILSON, "Jerusalem", *PEFQSt* (1873) 37-38, raised the possibility that the cult place was on the natural platform immediately to the north of the mound (for results of excavations there see below).

[52] I. FINKELSTEIN, "The Earliest Israel: Territorial History in the Highlands of Canaan", *From Mari to Jerusalem*. Assyriological and Biblical Studies in Honor of Jack Murad Sasson (eds. A. AZZONI – A. KLEINERMAN – D.A. KNIGHT – D.I. OWEN) (Winona Lake, IN 2020) 404-412.

[53] M.-L. BUHL – S. HOLM-NIELSEN, *Shiloh*. The Danish Excavations at Tall Sailun, Palestine, in 1926, 1929, 1932, and 1963 (Copenhagen 1969) 33.

[54] I. SHARON – A. GILBOA – T.A.J. JULL – E. BOARETTO, "Report on the First Stage of the Iron Age Dating Project in Israel: Supporting a Low Chronology", *Radiocarbon* 49 (2007) 1-46, here 26; I. FINKELSTEIN – E. PIASETZKY, "The Iron I-IIA in the Highlands and Beyond: ¹⁴C Anchors, Pottery Phases and the Shoshenq I Campaign", *Levant* 38 (2006) 45-61.

[55] BUHL – HOLM-NIELSEN, Shiloh, scattered in the plates; S. BUNIMOVITZ – I. FINKELSTEIN, "Pottery", *Shiloh*. The Archaeology of a Biblical Site (ed. I. FINKELSTEIN) (MSIA 10; Tel Aviv 1993) 81-196, here 188.

[56] Z. YEIVIN, "Shiloh — Excavation on the Northern Plateau", *Judea and Samaria Studies* 2 (1992) 95-110 (Hebrew).

Iron I in the highlands. The finds also strengthen the notion that Iron I Shiloh cannot be understood as a typical habitation site, of the type well-known in the highlands, since all the remains found so far are of a public/administrative nature.

(2) More important for this article, two horned stone altars have recently been found (out of context) at the site. One was discovered in 2013 [57], the other in 2019 [58]. Stone altars of this type are typical of the Iron II; they are not known in the Iron I [59]. Hence these altars testify to cult activity at the site in the Iron IIA and/or Iron IIB.

(3) Excavations on the flat natural platform adjacent to the mound in the north revealed remains of a building that was probably constructed in the Iron IIA and which continued to function until it was abandoned in the Iron IIB [60].

Evidence of activity in the Persian and Hellenistic periods on the mound is weak, limited to a small number of stray sherds. Remains of these periods were uncovered on the northern platform [61]. This may hint at continuity of cultic activity during the Iron IIB.

3. *Aphek*

The site of Aphek features Iron I and Iron IIA remains [62]. The Iron IIA settlement was destroyed in the second half of the ninth century BCE, probably in the course of Hazael's activities in the region; the pottery assemblage seems to hint at a destruction date late in that century [63]. A place named Aphek is mentioned in relation to Hazael's attack on Israel in the Lucianic recension for 2 Kgs 13,22: "And Hazael took Philistia from his [Jehoahaz's] hands, from the western sea to Aphek". This Aphek has traditionally been identified with the town in the Sharon (the same

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[57] https://biblewalks.com/sites/ShilohAltars.html, Altar C, last connection 04/23/2020, last update 01/21/2017.

[58] Picture at: https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Was-the-corner-of-Gods-altar-found-in-Shiloh-West-Bank-606477, last connection 04/23/2020, date of the article 10/31/2019.

[59] S. GITIN, "Incense Altars from Ekron, Israel and Judah: Context and Typology", *ErIsr* 20 (1989) *52-*67. Additional altars to those, which appear in Gitin's list were found in Iron II contexts at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Tel Dothan and Horvat Tevet in the Jezreel Valley.

[60] R. LIVYATAN BEN-ARIE – H. HIZMI, "Tel Shiloh – Excavations in the Northern Area, Seasons 2012 and 2013", *Judea and Samaria Studies* 23 (2014) 113-130 (Hebrew).

[61] YEIVIN, "Shiloh"; LIVYATAN BEN-ARIE – HIZMI, "Tel Shiloh" respectively.

[62] Y. GADOT, "Iron Age (Strata X11-X6)", *Aphek-Antipatris II*. The Remains on the Acropolis (eds. Y. GADOT – E. YADIN) (MSIA 27; Tel Aviv 2009) 88-108.

[63] A. KLEIMAN, "A Late Iron IIA Destruction Layer at Tel Aphek in the Sharon Plain", *TA* 42 (2015) 177-232.

Aphek which is referred to in the Ark Narrative) and the "western sea" was equated with the Mediterranean [64]. No clear Iron IIB-C remains were found at the site, and there is no evidence of activity in the Persian period. Hellenistic remains were unearthed in several areas but have not yet been published, so their exact date is unknown.

4. *Ashdod*

Archaeological research in Philistia has demonstrated that the Philistine centers rose to prominence in different periods [65]. Among the more northern ones, Ekron was the largest in the Iron I, Gath in the Iron IIA, and Ekron again in the Iron IIC [66]. The largest and most prosperous Philistine center in the Iron IIB was Ashdod (inland Tel Ashdod), which at that time covered an area of ca. 30 hectares. In fact, the expansion of Ashdod from the upper tell to the lower city started in Stratum X [67]. This layer had previously been dated to the Iron IIA in general [68]. Pottery figures for this layer published by Ben-Shlomo [69] reveal forms that seem to indicate a date at the end of Iron IIA, in the late ninth century BCE [70]. It seems, then, that Ashdod expanded as a result of the destruction of Gath by Hazael and prospered for about a century, until Sargon II's campaigns to Philistia. Yet, the transition from Stratum X to Stratum VIII of the eighth century [71]

[64] E.g., E. Lɪᴘɪ́ɴsᴋɪ, *The Aramaeans. Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Leuven 2000) 386; R. Fʀᴀɴᴋᴇʟ – M. Kᴏᴄʜᴀᴠɪ, "Identification of the Site", *Aphek-Antipatris I. Excavations of Areas A and B, the 1972-1976 Seasons* (eds. M. Kᴏᴄʜᴀᴠɪ – P. Bᴇᴄᴋ – E. Yᴀᴅɪɴ) (MSIA 19; Tel Aviv 2000) 9-15, here 18; A. Sᴄʜᴇɴᴋᴇʀ, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher. Die hebräische Vorlage der ursprünglichen Septuaginta als älteste Textform der Königsbücher* (OBO 199; Fribourg 2004) 113-115; Kʟᴇɪᴍᴀɴ, "Tel Aphek"; the latter rightly refuting recent proposals that argued for different identifications.

[65] Meaning that the biblical idea of a Philistine Pentapolis is a construct of the Deuteronomistic author/s.

[66] For Gath, see Mᴀᴇɪʀ, "Tell es-Safi/Gath"; for Ekron, see Dᴏᴛʜᴀɴ – Gɪᴛɪɴ, "Miqne Tel (Ekron)".

[67] I. Fɪɴᴋᴇʟsᴛᴇɪɴ – L. Sɪɴɢᴇʀ-Aᴠɪᴛᴢ, "Ashdod Revisited", *TA* 28 (2001) 231-259.

[68] Ibid; D. Bᴇɴ-Sʜʟᴏᴍᴏ, "Introduction", *Ashdod VI. The Excavations of Areas H and K (1968-1969)* (eds. M. Dᴏᴛʜᴀɴ – D. Bᴇɴ-Sʜʟᴏᴍᴏ) (IAA Reports 24; Jerusalem 2005) 1-9, here 9.

[69] D. Bᴇɴ-Sʜʟᴏᴍᴏ, "Material Culture", *Ashdod VI. The Excavations of Areas H and K (1968-1969)* (eds. M. Dᴏᴛʜᴀɴ – D. Bᴇɴ-Sʜʟᴏᴍᴏ) (IAA Reports 24; Jerusalem 2005) 63-246.

[70] See, for instance, Bᴇɴ-Sʜʟᴏᴍᴏ, "Material Culture", Fig. 3.73:2, 3.82:4-5 (wheel burnished; additional wheel burnished vessels in the same figure); these are forerunners of the Iron IIB. In this regard, note the comparative material cited by idem, 185. We are grateful to Assaf Kleiman for his input on this matter.

[71] There is no evidence at Ashdod for an independent Stratum IX (Fɪɴᴋᴇʟsᴛᴇɪɴ – Sɪɴɢᴇʀ-Aᴠɪᴛᴢ, "Ashdod Revisited", 242-244; idem, "Ashdod Revisited" – Maintained, *TA* 31 [2004] 122-135).

was not peaceful, as evidence of destruction was found in several dig-areas [72]. In other words, Ashdod seems to have started expanding in the late ninth century, suffered some sort of disruption at the end of that century or shortly thereafter and recovered during the eighth century BCE. The territory of Ashdod probably stretched inland to its west — note Sargon II's reference to Gath as a town in the territory of Ashdod [73]. Tel Ashdod features only limited activity in the Iron IIC; the main post-711 BCE activity seemingly shifted to Ashdod Yam [74]. The excavations revealed significant evidence of activity in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

5. *Beth-shemesh*

Beth-shemesh prospered in the Iron I, Iron IIA and Iron IIB, until the Sennacherib destruction in 701 BCE [75]. A large Iron IIC settlement has recently been uncovered east of the mound [76]. In the Iron IIA-B, Beth-shemesh was the most important Judahite town in the northern Shephelah, that is, near the border with the Northern Kingdom (Fig. 1). This may explain the background to the event described in 2 Kgs 14,11-13, which may stem from annals: the battle between Joash and Amaziah at Beth-shemesh, which seems to have brought about the subjugation of Judah to Israel (more below).

Level 3 at Beth-shemesh was probably founded during the ninth century BCE and came to an end in a significant destruction event [77]. Seven radiocarbon determinations for two short-lived samples provided results [78], which can be translated to a destruction date in the 765-745 interval (68% probability [79]). In regard to 2 Kgs 14,11-13 this date can be understood in two ways: 1) the data (2 samples) are insufficient for establishing a reliable date, meaning, for instance, that additional samples may put

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[72] E.g., M. DOTHAN – Y. PORATH, *Ashdod IV.* Excavation of Area M ('Atiqot 15; Jerusalem 1982) 53-54; idem, *Ashdod V.* Excavation of Area G, the Fourth-Sixth Seasons of Excavations ('Atiqot 23; Jerusalem 1993) 13.

[73] NA'AMAN, *Ancient Israel's History*, 40.

[74] FINKELSTEIN – SINGER-AVITZ, "Ashdod Revisited"; idem, "Ashdod" — Maintained.

[75] S. BUNIMOVITZ – Z. LEDERMAN, *Tel Beth-Shemesh, a Border Community in Judah.* Renewed Excavations 1990-2000: The Iron Age (MSIA 34; Tel Aviv 2016).

[76] E. HADDAD, "Bet Shemesh, Tel Bet Shemesh", *ESI* 131 (2019). Most of the dig areas have not yet been presented in publications.

[77] BUNIMOVITZ – LEDERMAN, *Tel Beth-Shemesh*, 369.

[78] SHARON – GILBOA – JULL – BOARETTO, "Report", 40.

[79] I. FINKELSTEIN – E. PIASETZKY, "Radiocarbon-Dated Destruction Layers: A Skeleton for Iron Age Chronology in the Levant", *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 28 (2009) 255-274.
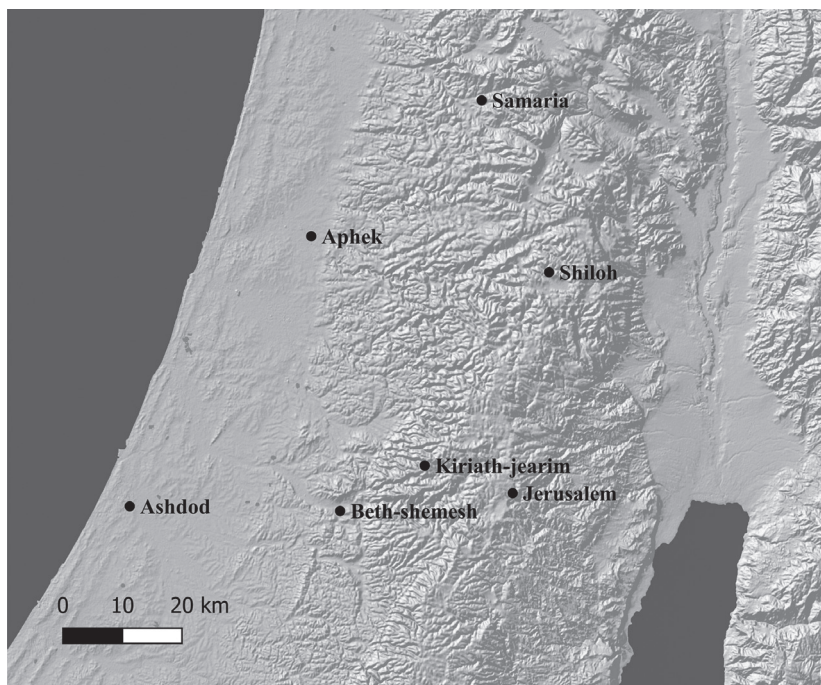
Fig. 1. – Capitals of Israel and Judah and places mentioned in
the old North Israelite Ark Narrative.

the destruction slightly earlier, fitting the days of Joash, who ruled until
784 BCE; 2) Joash pitched battle at Beth-shemesh; however, the actual
destruction of the town was inflicted somewhat later, by Jeroboam II.

IV. HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Kiriath-jearim, the focus of the original Northern Ark Narrative, is
decisive in our attempt to understand the reality behind the story. The
evidence of a monumental platform, which was erected there in the early
Iron IIB, shows that the story is no mere tale or myth devoid of historical
reality, and provides us with a chronological framework in the first half
of the eighth century BCE. This seems to be supported by the logic of
the text as well as finds at Shiloh, Aphek and Ashdod and the clue given
by 2 Kgs 14,11-13 regarding the battle between Joash and Amaziah at
Beth-shemesh. In other words, the places mentioned in the story, which
constitute a geographical skeleton of the narrative, have not been chosen
at random.

The first issue to deal with is the role of Shiloh in the narrative [80]. There is clear evidence that the core old tradition about this place in the Bible is the Ark Narrative. Other traditions related to the site were composed far later, based on the old text. This is the case where Shiloh is mentioned in texts about the division of the land and the tabernacle in the second half of the book of Joshua, the festival in Judges 21 and the stories about Samuel as a child (1 Samuel 1–3) [81].

In the early (?) and middle Iron I, until the second half of the eleventh century BCE, Shiloh was apparently a large temple-site, possibly linked with a territorial entity centered at Shechem. It is tempting to associate the destruction of this layer with the memory portrayed in the book of Jeremiah (7,12.14; 26,6.9). Yet, there are several difficulties with this assumption. The first problem is the (too) long time — over four centuries — between this event and the time of the prophet. Second, one could identify this as the earliest Israelite territorial formation, but in view of the revival of second millennium city-states in the lowlands of the southern Levant, the possibility of an Iron I Shechemite city-state continuing the tradition of the Late Bronze cannot be brushed aside [82]. Third, in view of the clues that Yнwн had a prominent place in the Northern Kingdom starting only in the ninth century BCE [83], it is highly doubtful whether Yнwн was the deity worshiped in Iron I Shiloh. Given the fact that the identification between Yнwн and El was very easy (contrary to any conflict between Yнwн and Baal), as shown in the Elijah narratives, one can suggest that the original deity revered at Shiloh was a manifestation of El [84].

[80] One should note that even in the context of the dtr redaction of the books of Samuel and Kings, the temple of Shiloh is not criticized. A similar observation can be made for the books of Hosea and Amos, which are in one way or another related to dtr ideology. Here again contrary to Bethel and other places Shiloh is not blamed. This could be related to the memory of the presence of the Ark of Yнwн in this shrine. Nor is the priestly dynasty of the Elides condemned in 1 Samuel 4; this occurs only in later additions in 1 Samuel 2 that presuppose the older Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4,1b – 7,1* and try to give a theological reason for the collapse of the Elides. Furthermore, the Deuteronomistic authors admit that in pre-monarchic times, before the construction of the Jerusalem temple, there was another chosen place – Shiloh. The idea that Yнwн had chosen Shiloh before Jerusalem is clearly set out in Jeremiah (7,12.14; 26,6.9). The linking object between the two sanctuaries is clearly the Ark.

[81] A.-K. KNITTEL, *Das erinnerte Heiligtum*. Tradition und Geschichte der Kultstätte in Schilo (FRLANT 273; Göttingen 2019), postulates that the oldest literary traditions about Shiloh are in 1 Sam 1,1-28; 2,18-21 and 4,1-18.

[82] I. FINKELSTEIN, "Was There an Early Northern (Israelite) Conquest Tradition?", *Eigensinn und Entstehung der Hebräischen Bibel*. Erhard Blum zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (eds. J.J. KRAUSE – W. OSWALD – K. WEINGART) (Tübingen 2020) 211-221.

[83] T. RÖMER, *The Invention of God* (Cambridge, MA – London 2015) 104-121; more below.

[84] Interestingly, Gen 33,20 reports that Jacob built an altar close to Shechem where he worshipped a deity called "El, the god of Israel".

In this respect, the two horned stone altars recently found at the site (see above) should be viewed as game-changers. They indicate that cult activity at the site was resumed in the Iron II. This could have happened in the late Iron IIA, sometime in the ninth century, that is, following a gap of a century or more after the destruction in the middle Iron I, or even somewhat later, in the Iron IIB in the eighth century. The place of this activity on the mound remains an enigma. It is logical to assume that starting in the Middle Bronze, all temples at Shiloh stood in one place — on the summit of the hill. As we have already noted, this area was built over time and again in later periods — from the Hellenistic through the Byzantine to Medieval and Ottoman times — and it has also become badly eroded. Accordingly, if an Iron II temple had been restricted to the summit, the remains could not have been expected to survive. Indeed, the situation in the Iron II could have been similar to that of the Late Bronze: following the destruction of the monumental Middle Bronze III compound, cult activity is evident only in a single *favissa*, which may represent refuse of limited activity on the summit. All in all, the Iron II sanctuary must have been far smaller than that of the Iron I and hence difficult (if not impossible) to trace.

In the Iron II, the deity worshiped at Shiloh was YHWH. First, judging from the Yahwistic names of the two later Omride monarchs, he was an important deity in Israel, perhaps the titular god of the dynasty, starting no later than the middle of the ninth century BCE. Second, the Nebo section in the Mesha inscription testifies to the existence of Yahwistic temples at that time. Third, it is only logical to associate the reference in Jeremiah to a YHWH temple at Shiloh (7,12.14; 26,6.9) with an Iron II cult place there, since the time difference would be only about two centuries (more on this below) [85]. The sacred object in this temple was probably an Ark — the abode of the deity.

The Iron II sherds that have been published [86] are insufficient for reconstructing the settlement history of the site in the different sub-phases of this period. Though it is easier to identify Iron IIB items, Iron IIA forms do appear in preliminary reports of the current digs at the site [87], and remains of this period seem to have recently been unearthed on the northern natural platform [88]. Based on the finds at Kiriath-jearim (which point

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[85] These texts indeed suggest that people can still go to Shiloh and see the ruins there.

[86] BUHL – HOLM-NIELSEN, *Shiloh*, scattered in the plates; BUNIMOVITZ – FINKELSTEIN, "Pottery", 188.

[87] Unpublished reports, the archaeology staff officer for Judea and Samaria; see also BUHL – HOLM-NIELSEN, *Shiloh*, Pl. 18: 246; XXVI: 205.

[88] LIVYATAN BEN-ARIE – HIZMI, "Tel Shiloh".

to reality in the early Iron IIB, the early eighth century BCE), we assume that at Shiloh the spotlight should be put on the late Iron IIA. This, in turn, opens two possibilities. The first is that the renewed activity at Shiloh can be associated with the Omride dynasty in the first half to the middle of the ninth century BCE. According to the second option, the activity at the site was renewed in the early Nimshide period, in the late ninth century. One could argue that the early Nimshides promoted the cult of Shiloh, slightly away from the capital Samaria with its Omride association. The fact that most of the Iron II sherds date to the Iron IIB and only a small number to the Iron IIA may support the second option — a Nimshide temple in the late ninth century BCE.

This scenario raises another no less tantalizing question regarding the event that caused the destruction of the proposed Iron II temple — the destruction referred to in the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7 and 26, see above). This could have been the result of either domestic strife in the Northern Kingdom or an enemy attack on the heartland of Israel. In the latter case, the only possible agent of destruction is Hazael, who spread havoc in the Jezreel Valley [89] and possibly also in the highlands (the destruction of Level VIId at Tell el-Farah=Tirzah [90]). In this regard, several clues point to a confrontation between Hazael and Israel at Aphek in the days of Jehoahaz (817/814-800 BCE):

- The Lucianic recension of 2 Kgs 13,22, according to which "Hazael took Philistia from his [Jehoahaz's] hands, from the western sea to Aphek" [91].
- The verse in 2 Kgs 13,7 stemming from annals (it was the original continuation of v. 3 [92]), saying that "there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing".
- The destruction of late Iron IIA Aphek, dated by Kleiman [93] late in the ninth century.

All this means that following a battle at Aphek, a Damascene force could have attacked Shiloh, located in the highlands ca. 40 km to the east.

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[89] N. NA'AMAN, "Historical and Literary Notes on the Excavation of Tel Jezreel", *TA* 24 (1997) 122-128.

[90] See A. KLEIMAN, "Comments on the Archaeology and History of Tell el-Far'ah North (Biblical Tirzah) in the Iron IIA", *Sem* 60 (2018) 85-104, for the most updated treatment.

[91] For arguments that G^L is original here, see S.L. MCKENZIE, *1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 16* (IECOT; Stuttgart 2019) 467.

[92] MCKENZIE, *1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 16*, 472.

[93] KLEIMAN, "Tel Aphek".

We have already indicated that placing the Ark Narrative in a pre-monarchic context is the work of the Deuteronomistic authors, noting as well the impossibility of reading it against the background of Iron I realities. We have also provided arguments that the references to the Philistine *seranim* and the Pentapolis do not belong to the old layer of the narrative. Still, the Philistines cannot be eliminated from the story, since they are portrayed as the enemy in the battlefield, and since their city Ashdod, with its temple of Dagan, plays a major role in the drama. In other words, if the historical reality of the collapse of Shiloh actually lies in a confrontation with Hazael in the days of Jehoahaz, why did the author present the Philistines as the enemy and how is the story connected to Ashdod? This is indeed the greatest difficulty in the reconstruction presented here.

In order to answer this question we note that: 1) the two victims of the Hazael attack in Cisjordan were Israel and Gath — the local powers that posed a threat to the territorial and economic goals of Damascus [94]; 2) the rise of Ashdod as the main city in the south was the result of the destruction of Gath; 3) Judah seems to have profited from the attack of Hazael on Gath, as the decline of the latter brought about the expansion of the Southern Kingdom to the Shephelah [95]; 4) in the highlands Judah seems to have taken the opportunity of the decline of Israel in order to push its border slightly to the north [96]. We would therefore raise the hypothesis that Ashdod (and Judah?) was allied with Hazael in the presumed confrontation with Israel at Aphek.

Several years later, pressure of Assyria on Damascus brought about the decline of the latter and the quick recovery of the Northern Kingdom, which had already started expanding in the days of Joash (cf. 2 Kgs 13,25 regarding the north). Israelite expansion attempts in the southwest could have led to the confrontation with Judah, that is, to the clash between Joash and Amaziah at Beth-shemesh. 2 Kgs 14,13 reports that Joash "broke down the walls of Jerusalem", probably meaning that Judah became a vassal of Israel [97]. Joash might also have caused the disruption at Ashdod in the transition from Stratum X to Stratum VIII.

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[94] For Gath, see A. FANTALKIN – I. FINKELSTEIN, "The Sheshonq I Campaign and the 8th Century Earthquake: More on the Archaeology and History of the South in the Iron I-Iron IIA", *TA* 33 (2006) 18-42, followed by E. BEN-YOSEF – O. SERGI, "The Destruction of Gath by Hazael and the Arabah Copper Industry: A Reassessment", *Tell it in Gath. Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of Aren M. Maeir on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (eds. I. SHAI – J.R. CHADWICK – L. HITCHCOCK – A. DAGAN – C. MCKINNY – J. UZIEL) (ÄAT 90; Münster 2018) 461-480.

[95] Ibid.

[96] FINKELSTEIN, "Saul, Benjamin".

[97] MCKENZIE, *1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 16*, 490-491.

Jeroboam II, son of Joash, led Israel to its peak prosperity territorially, economically and demographically, a situation that is reflected in the books of Hosea and Amos. Territorially, Israel expanded to Dan and possibly beyond and in northern Transjordan (Amos 6,13), continued its domination of Judah, and it was active far beyond Judah and the southern coast along the desert route from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean. The latter is attested in finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in northeastern Sinai [98] and possibly at Tell el-Kheleifeh at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba [99].

If our reconstruction is correct, in the days of Joash and Jeroboam II Israel struck back at its enemies in the north (Aram) and south — Ashdod and Beth-shemesh of Judah. Specifically regarding the Ark Narrative, in the days of the later Nimshides Damascus was no more an issue, but the Philistine cities could still have harassed Israel's ambitions along the southern coastal plain. Hence when the Ark Narrative was composed in the first half of the eighth century, the author could have replaced a memory of a confrontation against Hazael and his ally Ashdod with reference to the "Philistines" in general and Ashdod in particular. This was indeed a fitting strategy since the "Philistines" could easily be accepted as Israel's enemies from the beginning.

Whether an actual Northern Ark of YHWH was brought from Shiloh to the battlefield and taken to Ashdod in the days of Jehoahaz and then brought back to Israelite controlled territory in the days of Joash or Jeroboam II is, of course, impossible to say [100]. Still, one thing is clear: the most important scenes in the Ark Narrative outside the territory of Israel are the mockery of the Philistine city of Ashdod and its deity and the criticism of the Judahite town of Beth-shemesh — the two places which

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[98] For their Northern orientation, see, e.g., A. LEMAIRE, "Date et origine des inscriptions hebraïques et phéniciennes de Kuntillet 'Ajrud", *SELVOA* 1 (1984) 131-143; S. AHITUV – E. ESHEL – Z. MESHEL, "The Inscriptions", *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman)*. An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border (ed. Z. MESHEL) (Jerusalem 2012) 73-142, here 95, 126-129; N. NA'AMAN, "The Inscriptions of Kuntillet 'Ajrud through the Lens of Historical Research", *UF* 43 (2012) 1-43.

[99] I. FINKELSTEIN, "The Archaeology of Tell el-Kheleifeh and the History of Eziongeber/Elath", *Sem* 56 (2014) 105-136.

[100] Regarding the Ark, note two Assyrian reliefs showing the deportation of deities from vanquished Philistine cities. One can identify the deportation of big statues, but in each relief there is also a small deity standing in or on a box that may well represent an "ark" hosting the statue; for the representations see C. UEHLINGER, "Hanun von Gaza und seine Gottheiten auf Orthostatenreliefs Tiglatpilesers III.", *Kein Land für sich allein*. Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag (eds. U. HÜBNER – E.A. KNAUF) (OBO 186; Fribourg – Göttingen 2002) 92-125, here 125, and T. ORNAN, *The Triumph of the Symbol*. Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban (OBO 213; Fribourg – Göttingen 2005) 259.

bordered on Israel in the southwest (Fig. 1) and which could have posed a problem to Israelite expansion aspirations. First comes the ridicule of the Ashdodites and their god Dagan, who is portrayed as incapable of dealing with the ark of YHWH, which represents YHWH himself [101]. As for Beth-shemesh, the logic of 1 Sam 6,1-3 about the need of the Philistines to return the Ark in order to prevent more calamities makes the town "Israelite". But why does YHWH strike the Judahites of Beth-shemesh? The story is difficult to understand, but its essence is that the inhabitants of the town are incapable of hosting the North Israelite Ark. YHWH punishes them because they "looked into the Ark" (1 Sam 6,19) [102]. Perhaps this remark reflects the idea that one should not look at YHWH (whom the Ark hosted in the form of a statue), or that the people of the town did not know how to treat the Ark, opened it and saw what was inside. In any case, the sense is that Beth-Shemesh is not an appropriate place for the Ark [103].

The Ark then arrives peacefully at Kiriath-jearim. Why Kiriath-jearim, a town of not much significance otherwise? Why not take the Ark back to Shiloh, in the heartland of the Northern Kingdom? Why not Bethel, "the king's sanctuary […] a temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7,13), located just slightly to the north? In other words, what was the reason for choosing Kiriath-jearim as the location of the sanctuary of the Ark and accordingly — as shown by archaeology — invest a huge effort in the construction of the monumental platform there?

Kiriath-jearim is located on a commanding hill, overlooking the coastal plain all the way to the Mediterranean in the west, including the area of Ashdod and the strategic Valley of Aijalon, the western outskirts of modern Jerusalem in the east and the Judean hills in the area of Bethlehem and Hebron in the southeast. One of the main Roman roads from the coast to Jerusalem passes immediately below the southern slope of the mound [104]. An important road to Jerusalem must have passed along the same track in the Iron Age. Roman period remains at Kiriath-jearim, including both those retrieved in our excavations and inscriptions found in the

[101] This episode can be understood as a "counter history" of the practice of deportation of divine statues to a sanctuary of the vanquisher; see M. DELCOR, "Jahweh et Dagon (ou le Jahwisme face à la religion des Philistins, d'après 1 Sam. V)", *VT* 14 (1964) 136-154.

[102] LXX indicates a very different reason: "the sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice to see the ark of the Lord". For the differences between LXX[B] and LXX[L] and for the anteriority of MT, see GRILLET – LESTIENNE, *Premier Livre des Règnes*, 184-185.

[103] According to MCCARTER, *1 Samuel*, 131, "the Bet-shemeshites were smitten because they had no priests among them, and Yahweh would not permit his ark to be approached with unclean hands".

[104] M. FISCHER – B. ISAAC – I. ROLL, *Roman Roads in Judaea II*. The Jaffa – Jerusalem Roads (BAR.I 628; Oxford 1996).

early twentieth century [105], hint that the site served as a military camp during the Roman subdual of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Second-century BCE pre-Hasmonean remains at the site raise the possibility that it had a similar function over two centuries earlier, during the Seleucid attempts to put down the Hasmonean revolt [106]. The construction of the monumental platform on the summit of the site in the early eighth century BCE probably aimed at the same goal, in the sense that its builder, probably Jeroboam II, could have made this strategic place an administrative-military center aimed at dominating Jerusalem and the vassal kingdom of Judah. It seems feasible that the platform accommodated an administration building, a garrison, and the temple referred to in the Ark Narrative.

Choosing Kiriath-jearim as the location of the Temple of the Ark seems to have been linked to the ideology of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam II. In this period of territorial expansion and economic prosperity, Jeroboam II apparently engaged in the reorganization of the kingdom's cult, especially in promotion of temples which were connected to major Northern foundation narratives (Bethel, Penuel, Gilgal, Shechem and Kiriath-jearim) and temples on the boundaries of the kingdom in the north and south (Dan and Beer-sheba respectively [107]). The domination of Israel over Judah following the battle of Beth-shemesh created a genuine "United Monarchy", perhaps better called a "United Israel" situation, in which a king of Samaria ruled over all territories and people of the two Hebrew kingdoms combined, "from Dan to Beer-sheba". The idea of a Samaria-ruled United Israel seems to be expressed in two other Northern-derived biblical texts: the Conquest traditions and the description of Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings 4 [108].

To differ from simple domination of Judah, the North Israelite royal United Israel ideology must have been based on shared cultural traits, such as language and worship of YHWH as the dynastic (if not the national) deity. The Ark of YHWH could have been promoted by Jeroboam II as the most sacred object of his United Israel and placed in the new temple of the Ark on the monumental platform at Kiriath-jearim, a site located

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[105] H.M. COTTON – L. DI SEGNI – W. ECK – B. ISAAC – A. KUSHNIR-STEIN – H. MISGAV – J. PRICE – A. YARDENI (eds.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*. Vol. I, Jerusalem. Part 2. (Berlin 2012) 11, 26; FISHER – ISAAC – ROLL, *Roman Roads in Judaea II*, 119.

[106] FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, "Kiriath-jearim and the List of Bacchides".

[107] See I. FINKELSTEIN, "Jeroboam II's Temples", *ZAW* 132 (2020) 250-265; for Beer-sheba see N. NA'AMAN, "In Search of the Temples of YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman", *JANER* 17 (2017) 76-95.

[108] FINKELSTEIN, "(Israelite) Conquest Tradition?". After 720 BCE this idea was brought to Judah by Israelites and influenced the rise of the Deuteronomistic United Monarchy ideology there.

on the border between the Israelite tribes and Judah, which was proba-
bly the border between Israel and the vassal kingdom of Judah in his
time [109].

V. CONCLUSION

The main ideas presented in this article are as follows. When read with-
out Deuteronomistic redactions and later additions, the old Northern Ark
Narrative (the extent of which is limited to 1 Sam 4,1 – 7,1*) should not
be understood against the background of pre-monarchic times. This old
Ark Narrative reflects events which took place toward the end of the
ninth and early eighth century BCE; the concerns behind the compo-
sition portray the situation slightly differently thereafter in the days of
Jeroboam II. This is based on the archaeology of the sites mentioned in
the story, our understanding of the text, and our perception of the geopo-
litical reality of the time. The Ark Narrative deals with the transfer of the
Ark of YHWH from Shiloh to Kiriath-jearim and provides the *hieros logos*
for the temple of the Ark there.

We propose that the narrative is linked to a United Israel ideology in
Israel, according to which the territory and people of the two Hebrew
kingdoms should be ruled by a Northern king from Samaria. Choosing
Kiriath-jearim — on the border between Israel and Judah — as the loca-
tion for the temple of the Ark promoted this ideology.

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[109] The memory of Kiriath-jearim being associated with the Ark continues until today;
the present church built at the beginning of the 20th century is called "Notre Dame de l'Arche
de l'Alliance". The link is probably the Byzantine church/monastery which commemorated
the Ark, on the remains of which the new church was constructed.

SUMMARY

In this article we deal with the historical realities behind what we consider to belong to the old part of the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4,1 – 7,1). Based on the finds of excavations at Kiriath-jearim, Shiloh and other places mentioned in the story as well as exegesis of the text and an understanding of the geopolitical situation, we suggest that the story reflects the ideology and aspirations of Israel in the first half of the eighth century BCE, the time of Jeroboam II. We propose that the main theme of the narrative is the transfer of the Ark of Yнwн from Shiloh to Kiriath-jearim on the border of Israel and Judah. This narrative is apparently connected to a United Israel ideology in the days of Jeroboam II, according to which the territory and people of the two Hebrew kingdoms should be ruled by a Northern king from Samaria; this was the de-facto situation following the victory of Joash over Amaziah at Beth-shemesh (2 Kgs 14,11-13). Choosing Kiriath-jearim as the location for the temple of the Ark was related to this concept.