

# Studies in the History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel and Judah

Edited by  
IDO KOCH and  
OMER SERGI

*Archaeology and Bible*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Archaeology and Bible

Edited by

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# Introduction

*Omer Sergi and Ido Koch*

The archaeological and historical study of the Southern Levant during the first millennium BCE – the Iron Age kingdoms and their societies, as well as their successors in the Persian and Hellenistic periods – has dramatically developed in recent decades. This is the result of two common and overlapping trends: one is the vast archaeological exploration of the Southern Levant and the other is the shift that has taken place in the studies of biblical literature. The archaeological exploration of the Southern Levant is as vibrant as ever and is constantly evolving. A brief look at the number of monographs, reports and articles published in recent years, the multitude of conferences and workshops held (mostly in Israeli institutes) and the proliferation of journals dedicated to the archaeology of the Southern Levant – would tell the story of the most explored region across the globe. Two significant components form the base of the current flourishing. One is the vast body of material data that has emerged as the result of the intensive development of infrastructure in the State of Israel, which triggers major salvage excavation projects. Fine examples of the former come from Jerusalem, which is studied year-round by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in collaboration with university-based projects in numerous salvage excavations. The other component is the changing research focus of university-based projects in specific regions. A prime example of this is the intense exploration of the Shephelah (an area spanning 100 square kilometres) by no less than ten projects focusing on the Bronze and Iron Ages between 2010 and 2020.<sup>1</sup> These and other projects across the Southern Levant provide accumulative data, develop innovative methods and trigger discussions on the interpretation of the material remains and their interaction with written sources that stimulate the ongoing archaeological and historical study of Judah, the Central Highlands and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> These include Tel Gezer (Israel Nature and Parks Authority and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; IAA and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) Tel Beth-Shemesh (Tel Aviv University), Tell eš-Šafi (Bar-Ilan University), Kh. Qeiyafa (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Tel Azekah (Tel Aviv University), Tel Burna (Ariel University), Tel Zayit (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), Tel Lachish (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Southern Adventist University; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Austrian Academy of Science), Kh. ar-Rai (HUJI and the Southern Adventist University), Tel Eton (Bar-Ilan University) and Tel Ḥalif (Emory University).



At the same time, recent decades have witnessed a dramatic shift in the treatment of textual sources – first and foremost, the Hebrew Bible. Longstanding paradigms regarding the formation of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets have been dismissed in the face of new and bold models, provoking new reconstructions of biblical history. In a nutshell, the Documentary Hypothesis, which governed the study of the Pentateuch from the late nineteenth century, has been almost completely abandoned over the past five decades. Gone are the old assumptions about the relatively consistent narrative works encompassing the entire mythic history in Genesis–Deuteronomy, many of which were dated to the monarchic period, in some cases even to the reign of Solomon. Instead, many scholars now agree that the narrative blocks of the Pentateuch (i.e., the Patriarchs’ stories and the Exodus) were composed at different times in different places and were not compiled and redacted into the relatively coherent story in Genesis–Deuteronomy before the Persian period. Such developments in biblical studies have provoked new historical reconstructions regarding the Iron Age and the Persian period in the Southern Levant.

The ten contributions in this volume demonstrate the range of questions, methods and theoretical frameworks employed in the current study of Judah and neighbouring regions during the first millennium BCE and beyond. They were all written by Oded Lipschits’ close circle of colleagues – his former teacher and ten of his students, who have dedicated their contributions to honour his scholarship.

Oded Lipschits’ innovative research on Judah and the Southern Levant in the Iron Age and the Persian and Hellenistic periods reflects the vibrant and multifaceted research of this region in the past decades. From archaeology to biblical studies, from his ground-breaking study of 600 years of administration in Judah to his extensive excavation projects in Ramat Raḥel, Tel Azekah and Tel Moza – all have brought to light new and intriguing material remains, provoking new reconstructions and new historical models. The research carried out and initiated by Oded has undoubtedly impacted scholarship in a profound manner and has shaped new ways through which we see the history of the Southern Levant, primarily Judah, during and after the monarchic period.

In his capacity as the Director of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, Oded dedicated over twelve years to making the institute one of the leading research establishments worldwide. He founded a successful international program that brings young scholars from around the world to Tel Aviv; he built research laboratories and integrated the natural sciences within the research profile of the institute; and he established fruitful collaborations with scholars and institutions throughout the world. By doing so, Oded has turned Tel Aviv University’s Institute of Archaeology into a vibrant, interdisciplinary establishment – and all this without neglecting his various research and teaching activities.

Beyond his vast array of research endeavours and managerial skills, Oded was always, first and foremost, the “father” of many students. With over one hundred students who conducted research for their MA thesis and almost seventy PhD students under his supervision, Oded made an even greater impact not only on scholarly discourse but on its academic landscape too. Oded’s many students are engaged in various research fields ranging from archaeological sciences to biblical exegesis, in some cases developing new methodologies and tools to be used regularly thereafter. Even more important, however, is that despite the large number of students whom he supervises, despite the fact that he directs three major archaeological projects and despite his busy life as the Director of the Institute, he never compromises on the personal father-like care that he shows for his students. Always attentive, always accessible and always smiling, Oded takes care not only of the academic levels of his students but also of their well-being and not only during their studies but much after – assisting them in the pursuit of their careers. If there is something that we all – as his former students – have learned from Oded, it is that our own students must come first and that the measure of a scholar is judged not only by the quality and quantity of his research products but also – and perhaps especially – by his ability to nurture and raise an ever-growing generation of young scholars.

It is, therefore, our great pleasure to dedicate this book to our beloved and appreciated teacher, colleague and friend, Professor Oded Lipschits, upon the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. The contributions among the pages of this volume present new views on the history and archaeology of the Southern Levant on the basis of diverse methodologies and research tools – thus reflecting Oded’s own research interests. It is our fervent hope that Oded will enjoy another 60 years of productive and ground-breaking research and will encourage even more students and young scholars to take their first steps in the academic world.

One of the most challenging conundrums in the study of the period is the projection of biblical texts onto material remains (and vice versa) and the creation of scholarly paradigms. *Nadav Na’aman*, in a contribution titled “Saul’s Story-Cycle: A North Israelite or Judahite Composition?”, presents a critical analysis of one of these scholarly constructs that gained much popularity in recent years: the assumption that Saul’s story-cycle was composed in the Northern Kingdom. In contrast to the over-reliance by scholars on the assumed northern geography of the narrative, Na’aman highlights Saul’s ambiguous presentation in stories conventionally attributed to the assumed northern scribal circles. He concludes that the stories were written in Jerusalem, during the high days of the Judahite monarchy in the late Iron Age, by scribes who could not reject the importance of Saul as the first king and therefore portrayed him in a hostile tone.

New perspectives on destructions and their impact on the local society are presented in three contributions. In “The Transformative Capacities of

Destructions in the Lowlands of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah”, *Omer Sergi* and *Ido Koch* explore the reactions of the courts at Samaria and Jerusalem to the waves of destruction that wreaked havoc upon the adjacent lowlands: the Jezreel Valley to the north of Samaria and the Shephelah to the west of Jerusalem. They reconstruct how the annihilations of local social structures in the lowlands were followed by a more centralised structure of both kingdoms, whose courts shifted economic activities, population movement and cultic patterns in a way that increased their direct control of resources.

*Alexandra Wrathall* further discusses reactions to destructions and societal resilience in “‘Before the Earthquake’ (Amos 1:1): Evaluating New Archaeological Evidence for the ‘Amos Earthquake’ in Judah”. Wrathall reassesses the much-debated earthquake of the mid-eighth century BCE on the basis of data sets from Jerusalem and the Shephelah, old and new alike. She revisits archaeological data, scrutinises the history of scholarship and, relying on evidence of seismic activity, discusses the complexity of natural disasters in the archaeological record and modes of human reactions to such events. Wrathall argues that the people in the Kingdom of Judah had a greater ability to restore the earthquake damage than their neighbours to the north, and she offers a destruction/restoration framework for the archaeological study of earthquakes.

“Sensible Havoc? The Neo-Babylonian Campaigns to the Southern Levant and Ideological Aspects of Destruction” by *Nitsan Shalom* presents another aspect of the study of destruction: the visual and textual representations of conquests and destructions in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources, compared to the material evidence for destructions created by these empires. Shalom discusses the differences between the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian portrayals of the events, their ideological motivations and the evidence on the ground for these events. She concludes that a combination of pragmatic and strategic considerations alongside ideological frameworks and religious perceptions all shaped the acts of the armed forces.

Four contributions were infused by the immense exploration of Jerusalem and its surroundings. The days of Jerusalem’s greatness are at the heart of *Abra Spiciarich*’s “Animal Economy and Sacrifice in First Temple Jerusalem: An Inter-Site Analysis of Iron Age II Faunal Assemblages”. Spiciarich analyses a faunal assemblage from a small dwelling on the eastern slope of the South-eastern Hill of Jerusalem, and compares it to other assemblages from domestic and public contexts across the city. By doing so, she discusses the role played by inhabitants of the various parts of Jerusalem and identifies economic variation between them.

Recently published data from Jerusalem and the Shephelah features in the contribution by *Sabine Kleiman*, “Interpreting Ancient Artefacts: The Case of the So-Called ‘Toilet Seats’ from Iron Age Judah”. Kleiman scrutinises these cube-shaped objects with round openings and their common scholarly interpretation as ancient latrines. She argues that the archaeological evidence speaks

against the use of such installations as lavatories and proposes that they served cultic purposes.

Further on Jerusalem and its exploration is the contribution by *Efrat Bocher*, “Organisation and Reorganisation of Extravagant Complexes in the Post-Destruction Southern Outskirts of Jerusalem”. Bocher synthesises data from the late Iron Age and Persian period in the hills south of the ancient city. She deals with the three sites of Ramat Raḥel, Mordot Arnona and Armon ha-Natziv, which are considered royal administrative centres or estates. Bocher discusses the relations between the three sites and Jerusalem during the late Iron Age and the changes that occurred following the destruction of the capital in the early sixth century BCE.

In “Judahite Pottery during the Sixth Century BCE,” *Liora Freud* presents a comprehensive pottery typology of the late Iron Age and post-destruction Jerusalem and its environs. Freud has based her studies on data from unpublished excavations in Jerusalem and neighbouring sites, most notably Ramat Raḥel, allowing her to provide a fine-tuned typology of the late Iron Age, the Babylonian period and the Persian period. In doing so, Freud contributes to a scholarly understanding of the continuity in the region, specifically in the rural hinterland, that carried on local knowledge and traditions.

The importance of the study of rural societies is further highlighted by *Karen Covello-Paran* in her contribution “Village People – The Jezreel Valley during the Intermediate Bronze Age”. Although dealing with the Jezreel Valley during the latter part of the third millennium BCE, Covello-Paran contributes to the growing scholarly interest in the archaeology of rural societies that will benefit the study of later periods as well. Covello-Paran studies these communities and reconstructs the social, economic and cultural networks connecting them, thus illustrating the household’s economic and social role as the basic social unit.

The rural hinterland is prominent in *Yitzhak Lee-Sak*’s “Reassessment of Benjaminite Settlements in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE: Archaeological and Textual Snapshots”. Lee-Sak tries to legitimise the results of Lipschits’ studies about the settlement dynamics of the Benjamin district during the entire Persian period and to understand the primary political and economic status of Benjamin within Persian Yehud in light of the two lists of the Benjaminite towns in Ezra and Nehemiah. Lee-Sak’s critical review confirms that since the Babylonian destruction, the district of Benjamin played a pivotal role in Yehud’s administrative system. The data also helps explain the gradual movement and resettlement of Benjamin from the north to the south and even to the west, which continued into the Early Hellenistic period. According to Lee-Sak, the texts echo the gradual movement of the Benjaminite population from the north to the south in the early–mid-fifth century BCE, the revival of sites in along the coasts and the desert fringe and the continuous settlement in the area of Benjamin in the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic eras.

Many people assisted us in the production of this book, and we wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to them. Special thanks to Ms. Tsipi Kuper-Blau, Director of Publications of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, for her editorial work and language supervision. We would also like to thank Elena Müller and Markus Kirchner from Mohr Siebeck for supporting this project from its early stages as written manuscripts and all the way till the final publication of the book. We wish to likewise thank the editors of the Archaeology and Bible series, Israel Finkelstein, Deirdre Fulton, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid for supporting this project. We hope that the contributions gathered here will reflect on the multi-faceted nature of the current archaeological research in the Southern Levant, and by doing so will make a humble tribute to Oded Lipschits, in honour of his multifaceted scholarship and his profound contribution to the study of the region.

# Organisation and Reorganisation of Extravagant Complexes in the Post-Destruction Southern Outskirts of Jerusalem

*Efrat Bocher*

In the 1950s and 1960s, Yohanan Aharoni excavated the ancient site of Ramat Raḥel. The excavation yielded a monumental building, marking it as a significant and even royal site south of Jerusalem. Several decades later, a new generation of archaeologists decided it was time to revisit the ruins of Ramat Raḥel. With Oded Lipschits at the helm, in collaboration with Yuval Gadot of the Tel Aviv University and Manfred Oeming of the University of Heidelberg, a five-season expedition brought to light new finds and, with them, new insights into the archaeology and history of Judah from the end of the Iron Age and up to the Persian period. During this long span, Ramat Raḥel functioned as an administrative centre that had endured the destruction of the First Temple. It peaked in the Persian period, a three-century era in Judah that archaeological research has had great difficulty identifying and comprehending.<sup>1</sup>

The excavation of Ramat Raḥel has resulted in several important studies that have greatly influenced the understanding of the Kingdom of Judah in many areas. Among these are the study of the stamped storage-jar handles and the conclusion that this was a system that operated, in several phases, from the Iron Age to the Hasmonean period,<sup>2</sup> the study of gardens and luxurious plants,<sup>3</sup> the study of late Iron Age and the Babylonian period pottery<sup>4</sup> and the study of volute capitals.<sup>5</sup>

Another study developed during the same period focused on the landscape around Jerusalem at the end of the Iron Age and the Persian period, mainly the region to the immediate south of the city. This area experienced a sharp increase in human activity at the end of the Iron Age, during which many small rural sites and agricultural installations mushroomed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lipschits 2021: 1–5.

<sup>2</sup> See an extensive summary in Lipschits 2018; 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Langgut et al. 2013; Gross, Gadot and Lipschits 2020: 459–468.

<sup>4</sup> Freud 2018; 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Lipschits 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Gadot 2015; 2022.

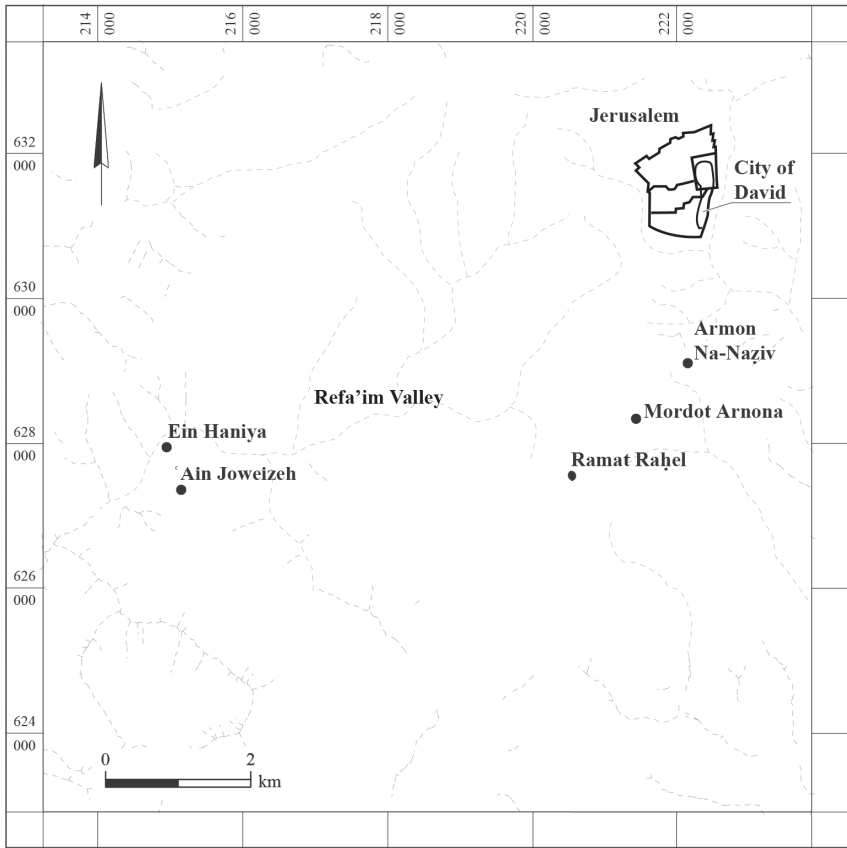


Figure 1. Site location map (Alina Yoffe-Pikovsky).

In this paper, I deal with this region as understood following the recent recovery of two additional sites alongside Ramat Raḥel: Mordot Arnona<sup>7</sup> and Armon ha-Natziv<sup>8</sup> – all three located on the same ridge. These sites have shed new light on the reorganisation of rural areas in the hinterlands of Jerusalem at the end of the Iron Age period and after the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah. At first, I review the archaeological finds at the sites and then discuss the regional change and follow this with a new understanding of the area south of Jerusalem (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Sapir et al. 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Billig, Freud and Bocher 2022.

<sup>9</sup> It was my honor and privilege to work alongside professor Lipschits during my years as a graduate student at Tel Aviv University. I dedicate this contribution to him on his 60th birthday.

## 1. Ramat Raḥel

As stated above, Ramat Raḥel has been considered the most prominent site on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem. The site is located west of the namesake Kibbutz, at the top of a prominent hill halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. At the foot of the hill, a road that connects Jerusalem with Hebron (and farther south with Beersheba) intersects a road that ascends from Beth Shemesh and the Repha'im Valley. By the Iron age IIC, the latter functioned as an agricultural breadbasket that was unparalleled in the region of Jerusalem and was, therefore, of great economic importance.<sup>10</sup>

Aharoni and his team unveiled a square fortress, surrounded by casemate rooms with inner and outer courtyards, which he at first attributed to Stratum V.<sup>11</sup> South of the northern casemate wall, another structure revealed an ancient wall beneath its floor, indicating an older phase of the citadel, which caused him to split the Stratum in two – Va and Vb.<sup>12</sup> North of the citadel, Aharoni confirmed the existence of additional structures.<sup>13</sup> A small remnant of the walls of the Stratum Vb buildings was uncovered under the casemate wall of Stratum Va,<sup>14</sup> as well as remains of another retaining wall south of the citadel.

In the eastern area of the site, Aharoni discovered a gate with numerous burn marks on it, which he suggested were a result of the 586 BCE destruction.<sup>15</sup> A courtyard was uncovered outside the gate which, like the central courtyard of the citadel, was paved with white chalk.

Aharoni dated the citadel and the casemate wall to the end of the seventh century BCE and the beginning of the sixth century BCE.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the architecture, Aharoni unearthed many important Iron Age finds, such as hundreds of stamps imprinted on jar handles, dozens of figurines, three complete and several fragments of volute capitals, and many architectural fragments of window balustrades and pyramid-shaped stones.

The renewed expedition took upon itself to produce a full publication of the results of Aharoni's excavations in Ramat Raḥel. The fragmentary and, in many ways, sketchy documentation of Aharoni's findings was processed and transformed into a final report.<sup>17</sup> Several issues were clarified and several conclusions reached by Aharoni were refuted. In the following report, the excavators divided the Iron Age and the Persian period into three phases (Table 1).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gadot 2015: 16–20; Lipschits, Gadot and Oeming 2020a: 3–7.

<sup>11</sup> Aharoni 1962: 10–11.

<sup>12</sup> Aharoni 1964: 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 53.

<sup>15</sup> Aharoni 1962: 25–27.

<sup>16</sup> Aharoni 1964: 120.

<sup>17</sup> Lipschits, Gadot and Freud 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Gadot et al. 2020: 28.



Table 1. Ramat Raḥel building phases.

<i>Building Phase</i>	<i>Aharoni's Stratum</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Date (BCE)</i>
<i>Building Phase I:</i> Royal administrative centre under imperial hegemony	Vb	Iron II	End of the eighth or beginning of the seventh century
<i>Building Phase II:</i> Royal administrative centre under imperial hegemony, casemated by garden	Va	Iron II–Persian	The second half of the seventh century
<i>Building Phase III:</i> Extended construction	IVb	Persian	End of the sixth or beginning of the fifth century until the end of the fourth century

As seen in the table, the excavators identified a fortress surrounded by a garden, which developed under the hegemony of the ruling empires and was used for administrative purposes (Figure 2). They found that it originated in the Roman period and that there was no layer of destruction at the end of the Iron Age.<sup>19</sup> The complex of buildings was deliberately built high-up, to stand out from the surrounding landscape.

### 1.1 Phase I

The buildings constructed during this phase included a number of structures on the eastern slopes of the site, with the tower, discovered located at the summit.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.2 Phase II

“Building Phase II provided the site with its current monumental outline and added a magnificence unknown at other locations in Judah. It was an expression of grand vision and broad architectural concept of planning required for this complex enclave, including its uniform contours, the relationship between elements, high quality of construction and broad scale of infrastructure”.<sup>21</sup> To these structures, the excavators attributed an inner courtyard surrounded by buildings to the north, west and south. Another building with another courtyard, was built to the east. Towards the west of the courtyard stood the Phase I tower that was surrounded by a royal garden with water facilities, pools and canals. The renewed excavation referred to the buildings from this stage as a palace complex that served as the nerve centre of the imperial rule in Judea.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Gadot, Tal and Taxel 2016: 184–188.

<sup>20</sup> Lipschits, Gedot and Oeming 2020b: 476–477.

<sup>21</sup> Lipschits, Gadot and Oeming 2020b: 478.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 478–481.

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