The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II

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The Cities of the Kingdom of Israel

Samaria

Samaria served as the capital of the Kingdom of Israel from the rule of Omri (878–871 B.C.E.) to the destruction of the kingdom. We know relatively little about the city during the period of the Monarchy. Its area probably reached several hundred dunams, but the area excavated includes primarily the royal complex in the heart of the city (for the excavation report, see Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik 1942).

Public Buildings. The royal complex is a sort of inner city (fig. 1), including the king's palace, storerooms, and administrative structures (Fritz 1995: 128-31). The fact that Samaria was the capital of a kingdom is clearly reflected in the archaeological finds: in the royal complex, there were monumental buildings constructed of ashlar stones, including fine capitals. Small finds that were discovered inside the buildings also indicate the site's importance: in one building ivory carvings were found, and in another building the famous ostraca, known as the Samaria ostraca, were found. These ostraca indicate that a great amount of produce was concentrated in the site (but there is disagreement over its origins: Avigad 1982; Rainey 1988; see further discussion below). According to Chaney, the clear physical distinction between the royal complex and the rest of the city indicates that there was obvious social stratification in this site (Chaney 1986: 71).

Hazor

Hazor was an important city in the Hula Valley, close to one of the branches of the international highway (Yadin 1972; 1975; S. Geva 1989). It appears that during most of Iron Age II it served as a central administrative city, and various officials and position-holders (and perhaps also a military force) lived there (Herzog 1997a). The archaeological evidence also shows that in the eighth century B.C.E. the city occupied all of the upper tell.

Several levels from the eighth century B.C.E. have been excavated at Hazor. The following discussion concentrates particularly on the level in which the remains were most clearly uncovered, stratum VI, reflecting the middle of the eighth century B.C.E. (the days of Jeroboam II?), a period of economic prosperity (Yadin 1972: 179-85). Several public buildings and a large number of houses from this stratum were discovered in several excavation areas. In addition, a brief discussion of stratum V is also incorporated (but with caution) in order to increase the available information.

Public Buildings. The city in the eighth century B.C.E. was surrounded by a massive city wall, but the city gate from this period has not been discovered. At the highest point in the city (area B), a large citadel was discovered, with an open plaza in front of it. Perhaps this yard separated the royal section of Hazor from the other quarters of the city (S. Geva 1989: 93). Not far from the citadel was the city's large

10. The discovery of the ivories (small finds) in the grand palace does indeed indicate wealth, but the architectural context (the palace complex) speaks for itself, and the small finds such as the ivories only strengthen this interpretation. So, in this case there is a connection between the small finds and wealth; however, as in many cases, the architectural identification of wealth is more prominent (on this issue, see the appendix to this chapter).
water-system (in area L). A large royal-economic complex was also unearthed in area G (Yadin et al. 1958–61; Yadin 1972; 1975; Ben-Tor 1996; S. Geva 1989). The importance of the city is also implied in the Bible, and it is listed among Solomon's construction projects (1 Kgs 9:15) and among the settlements conquered by Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kgs 15:29).

Residential Buildings. On the basis of an analysis of the excavated areas (revealing only a small proportion of the city's area), we know that there was a residential quarter in the center of the city. One house was also excavated near the water system, and another building was found near the complex in area G. The buildings are as follows:

1. Near the corner of the tell, in area G, a residential house of the four-room-house type (building 10037c) has been almost completely excavated (fig. 2). The building was well constructed and had two floors. Its ground-floor area is slightly over 70 square meters. At least on two sides, the building is not attached to other buildings, and it appears to be freestanding.

2. In the center of the tell, in area A (fig. 3), a four-room house was fully excavated (building 2a). The building is well constructed, and its ground floor area is about 160 square meters. According to Yadin, this was "the most beautifully planned and preserved building among the Israelite structures at Hazor. In fact, it represents the finest example of the Israelite 'corner-court pillared house' of that period ever found in Palestine" (Yadin 1972: