

Press release

Universität Rostock

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06/05/2001

<http://idw-online.de/en/news35244>

Science policy
interdisciplinary
transregional, national

State Formation in Early Israel: Archaeological Research

STATE FORMATION AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION
IN EARLY ISRAEL:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN MEGIDDO AND ITS HINTERLAND

A Project of the Institute of Old Testament Studies and Biblical Archaeology, Rostock University and the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

The following work was carried out in 2000:

The fieldwork continued in area L in the excavation of the Palace 6000 and the "Stable Area". As a result of the renewed excavations of the monumental architecture of Palace 6000 it now seems to be clear that the building had a plan very different from the one published by the previous expeditions. In addition there are a number of close architectural and technical similarities with the 9th century BCE architecture of Samaria and Tel Jezreel. The German research is focusing on the architectural parallels with buildings in Syria, investigating the architectural history of the building as well as its ancient functions.

An archaeological survey was conducted in 1995 and 1999. The results of the survey were analyzed in 1999 and 2000. They will enable a full reconstruction of the settlement history of the valley. This information is invaluable for the study of the demographic and socio-economic processes which led to the demise of the 'Canaanite', second millennium system and to the rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BCE. The pottery collected in the survey is currently studied in order to trace the minute details in the habitation history of each site. In addition, we plan to reexamine the pottery which was collected in some of the sites in previous years, mainly by Nehemiah Zori in the 1950's. The next step will be to produce the settlement maps, with the sites marked according to size hierarchy.

As a result of both the archaeological survey and the historical-geographical research, Megiddo has proved to be one of the most important settlements in the Jezreel Valley. A focus of the research was on the period of the Late Bronze Age II, Iron Age I and IIA. Any political domination of northern Israel had to focus on Megiddo and its hinterland as a key area in the region. During the 10th century BCE, King Solomon of the so-called "United Monarchy" was probably less influential and politically present in Megiddo as previously assumed. At the same time the Phoenicians are not a politically dominant group in the Jezreel Valley around Megiddo. The city seems to have been situated exactly in an area of overlapping interests of political entities in the south and in the north. None of these entities, neither the mountain ruler Solomon, nor the Phoenicians were able to extent a direct political control over Megiddo. Thus the settlement remained a mainly independent city-state in the valley, although its politics had to be coordinated with and adjusted to the neighboring powers.

Only in the 9th century BCE Megiddo lost this independence and was incorporated into the northern kingdom, Israel. The city lost some of its previous functions and was no city-state anymore. It was now a functional settlement, being mainly an administrative center. One of the changing functions was the reorganization of the cult and the demolishing of the ancient cult site of the city. Thus, the city took a very different role in the political and geographical development of the Jezreel Valley than previously hold. Research still has to explain the role of the Phoenicians and their impact on the governmental institutions in this context. We hope that further analysis of our survey results in the Jezreel Valley will shed some light on this question.

A number of new methodological approaches of spatial analysis were developed and tested by the German team in order to analyze the social development of the ancient Israelite society and its political organization. Among these approaches was an analysis of evidence for marriage alliances in a rural Iron Age I context.

The German team also prepared bibliographical material for the research and collected evidence for an analysis of the historical toponymy of the research areas in northern Israel.

The main results of the research financed by the German Israeli Foundation will be published in the next future in a monograph, Megiddo Volume IV, which is currently in preparation. In addition to this, a number of articles and research papers have been published or are in print.

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