

Settlement Pattern during the Transition Period from the Iron I to Iron IIA in the Jezreel Valley

Xiaozhe Li

National Centre for Archaeology, Beijing, 100020, China

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Abstract: This study examines settlement patterns at key sites in the Jezreel Valley (Tel Rehov, Tel Yoqne'am, Tell Ta'annek, Megiddo) during the Iron I–IIA transition (early 10th to late 9th century BCE). By reconciling High and Low Chronology debates through archaeological evidence, the analysis reveals a process of *gradual, continuous development* rather than abrupt change. Key findings include: settlement continuity, territorial consolidation, and regional distinctiveness. The data demonstrate that the Jezreel Valley served as a nucleus for Israelite expansion, with Megiddo emerging as a strategic administrative hub by the 9th century BCE. This gradual evolution underscores the valley's role in shaping early Israelite territorial foundations.

1. Introduction

The Jezreel Valley—a fertile corridor linking the Mediterranean coast with the Jordan Rift Valley—served as a critical arena for early Israelite territorial expansion during the Iron Age I–IIA transition (early 10th–late 9th century BCE). Settlement patterns in this region offer indispensable insights into the socio-political evolution of nascent Israel, reflecting not only domestic organization but also broader processes of state formation. Yet interpretations of this pivotal era remain contested, primarily due to the enduring chronological debate between proponents of the High Chronology (conventional 1200–900 BCE framework) and Low Chronology (revised 10th–9th century BCE alignment)[5].

This study synthesizes archaeological evidence from four strategically significant sites—Tel Rehov, Tel Yoqne'am, Tell Ta'annek, and Megiddo—to address two central questions:

1) How did settlement structures evolve during this transition, and what do they reveal about Israelite integration into lowland territories?

2) Can a reconciled chronology (10th–9th century BCE) resolve persistent disputes about the pace and nature of territorial consolidation?

By analyzing stratigraphic sequences, architectural innovations, and regional distinctiveness, we demonstrate that the Jezreel Valley experienced gradual, continuous development rather than disruptive change—a finding with profound implications for understanding Northern Israel's emergence as a territorial entity.

2. The Chronology Definition

The chronology of the Iron Age I-IIA in Israel has been an ongoing debate since 1995-1996, when Finkelstein suggested a Low Chronology, which is lower by 60-100 years than the High Chronology [3]. While the conventional chronology defined the dates of the Iron I 1200-1000 B.C.E. and the Iron IIA 1000-900 B.C.E. [12], the Low Chronology suggested the transition between the Iron I to Iron II should be at the late 10th century B.C.E., about 900 B.C.E [7]. During the debate, Pharaoh Sheshonq's campaign in the Levant has been considered as the key point. According to the archaeological finds and the biblical description, the High Chronology [3] and Low Chronology [4] placed the destruction layer into different stratum.

After introducing the radiocarbon dating method [3][6], this dating system and historical documents have led both sides to more flexible conclusion. The gap was slightly narrowed; however, the different criterion on selecting the samples still resulting in the controversy conclusion between the High Chronology and Low Chronology. In this article, I intend to use the early 10th to the late 9th century B.C.E. as the transition period after combining the HC and LC's conclusion comprehensively.

2.1 Jezreel Valley

The Jezreel valley is a large fertile plain and inland valley south of the Lower Galilee region in Israel. There are several Iron Age sites known in the Jezreel Valley and the nearby Beth-Shean Valley, including Yoane'am, Megiddo, Taanach, Jezreel and Beth-Shean, etc. Determining the beginning of Israelite penetration into the valleys has important consequences for the study of the process of Israelite territory [7]. According to Finkelstein's view, there was a remarkable degree of cultural continuity in Jezreel Valley until at least the mid-11th century B.C.E., and it shows on evidence about the Israelite settlement in the Jezreel Valley before 10th century. In this article, in order to understand the progress of early Israelite settlement, I will illustrate the settlement pattern in several sites from this region: Tel Rehov, Tell Ta'annek, Tel Yoqne'am and Megiddo (Fig.1).

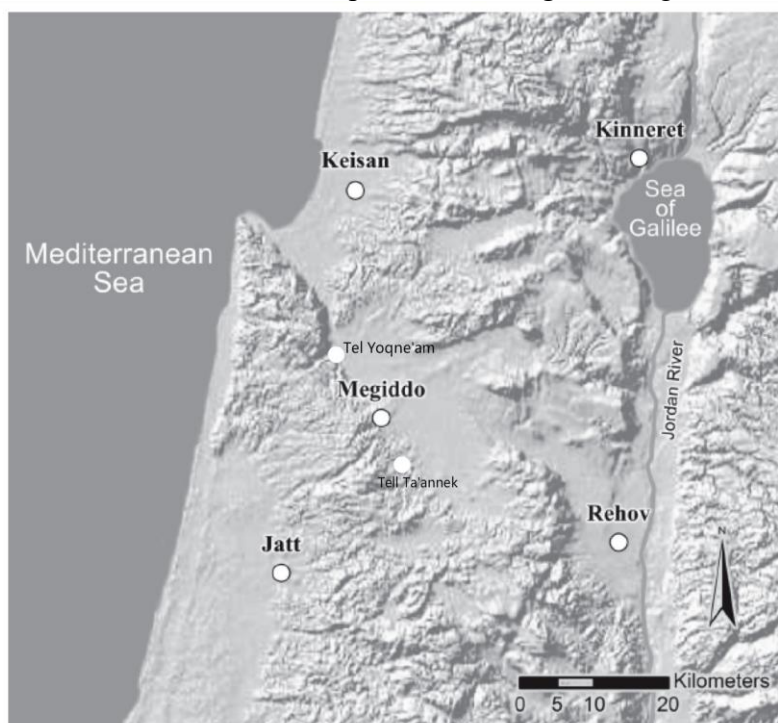


Fig.1 Map of the Jezreel Valley

2.2 Tel Rehov

Tel Rehov is located about 6 km west of Jordan River, 3 km east of Gilboa Ridge, and 5 km south of Tel Beth-Shean. The site is divided into an upper and lower mound. Both mounds have steep slopes, while the eastern side of the mound suffered severe erosion [9-11].

In terms of the excavation results [12], during the Iron Age IB, there were two architecture phases of a city constructed, destroyed and rebuilt. In Stratum D-4, a north-south street flanked by houses was excavated in the middle of the slope. No evidence of fortifications was discerned in any strata, and the edges of the buildings were eroded along the western slope of the mound. As for the Iron Age IIA, the town plan appears to have been preconceived and orderly, with a parallel of blocks of the well-planned buildings. However, the architecture of this period is exceptional in Iron Age Israel. There is no evidence at Tel Rehov of pillared buildings of four-room house or three-room house types. No fortifications were discerned in the lower mound. The renewed excavation work in the lower city [13] has provided evidence of occupation at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age and continuous urban settlement from thirteenth century to ninth century.

The settlement pattern from the lengthy period indicates that this site experienced a continuous development early from the thirteenth century to ninth century B.C.E.; while the appearance of the exceptional architecture elements represent a specific regional aspects of the Iron Age IIA material culture in the northern Israel, which, probably indicate the development of early Israelite settlement, with the pace of early stages of the Israelite territory.

2.3 Tel Yoqne'am

Yoqne'am is in a hilly region of the lower Galilee at the base of the Carmel Mountain and overlooks the Jezreel Valley. The excavations at this site focused on the area adjacent to the tell's north-western boundaries.

The stratigraphic sequence of the Iron Age is quite clear [1]: the Iron Age I could be divided into two phases, the first phase was dated to the beginning of the eleventh century, with the first Iron Age settlement and private dwellings; the second phase was the second half of eleventh century, during which the gradual development of settlement to densely populate one, with oil and metal industries became the general feature. The excavator suggests the Iron IIA consist of three stages: the first stage began from the tenth century B.C.E. with its temporary settlement; the second stage was dated to the middle of tenth century B.C.E., when the permanent settlement with dwellings and open spaces appeared; the last stage of Iron IIA covers the span of the second half of the tenth century B.C.E., during this time period, well-developed fortified city with casemate wall, water system dwellings and open spaces was the main characteristic.

The excavation report illustrates more details. At the Iron Age I stratum [1], there are three clearly visible building phases exposed, including raised walls and four floors. This part of the tell was densely inhabited, with the settlement spreading as far as the tell's boundaries. In addition, the apparent change in the nature of construction and in the building standard also proved the conclusion about the settlement's gradually development. As for the Iron Age IIA remains [1], the most apparently evidence are the city fortifications and the water system. The Iron Age IIA settlements represent a long-lasting, gradual process of development. The initial stage of the settlement was exposed in only one area and was characterized by meager remains of an ephemeral occupation; while for the next two stages, the two-stone wide walls, column bases, a massive casemate wall and the water system not only indicate the gradual process of the settlement, they also represent a continuity of settlement plan.

In conclusion, we can suggest that this site experienced a continuous, gradual development and expansion during the transition period from Iron I to Iron IIA.

2.4 Tell Ta'annek

Taanach is located on the southwest flank of the "Iron Hills" southeast of Megiddo, it lies between Megiddo and Ibleam on a northwest-southeast route. By the tenth century BCE, Taanach was an Israelite administrative and religious center. It may have served the same function during the Bronze Age.

The mound of Taanach was first excavated in 1902-1904 by Sellin; in 1963, 1966 and 1968, P. Lapp directed the three long seasons of excavations at the site [7]. By the end of Sellin's third season, he was certain that there were no sizeable buildings on the mound. In his final report, he included the plans of only five buildings, all of which he designated for trees. No other structures were described, but he located more than thirteenth cisterns. When Sellin found no defensibly city walls, he concluded that the site had been defended by a series of fortresses, the earliest was a modest structure with subterranean rooms, north of the center of the mound.

However, through Lapp's excavation results, the discovery of massively defenses on both south and west showed that the city had been protected by city walls in all major periods, which seems do not fit with Sellin's conclusion [12]. According to the three excavations, the results confirmed that this city had been extensively settled by architecture, as were other important sites. After a subsequent inhabitation from the Early Bronze Age, a slight eleventh-century occupation is followed by a large tenth-century presence, until it was destroyed by Shishak at about 918 B.C.E. In this way, we could conclude that this site was still a continuously developed settlement during this transitional period.

2.5 Megiddo

Megiddo is the key site for studying the history and settlement pattern of Jezreel Valley. It guarded the western branch of a narrow pass and trade route connecting Egypt and Assyria. The renewed excavations dealt with almost the entire sequence of the occupation at Megiddo, from stratum XX of the Chalcolithic/ Early Bronze Age IA to Stratum III of the Late Iron Age II.

The major change is that the public and royal character of Megiddo became more crystalized with the beginning of the monarchy [2]. The street planning and construction technique changed during this period: the old road which leads to the gate of the former strata was completely blocked by debris from the gate and the palace to its west. The gate expanded with two piers on each side connected by a large basalt threshold. The appearance of the change might have connection with the Hittite refugees who were familiar with the art of military architecture. In addition, the approach road of Stratum VA indicates another development, it was made of thick plaster, while in the later periods rubble pavements in the gate area came into use. Since no new city walls were found in the Stratum VB, we could assume that the Stratum VB used the same defense system from the former period. Moreover, the Stratum VA town developed out of the Stratum B village without any break, which means this city experiences a gradual peaceful growth during this time span.

Area H provides the best stratigraphic sequences for Iron Age Megiddo, with two pre-732B.C.E. Iron IIB layers, four IIA layers, one late Iron I layer and at least two early Iron I layers. This system of nine layers covers a time span of 370 years. Three of the settlements ended in destruction. At the same time, Area K has only a single IIB and a single early Iron I layer [8].

According to the excavation results (Stern E., Geva H., Paris A., and Aviram J., 2005: 1947-1948), in Area K, level K-5 revealed fragmentary remains of a domestic building. A large domestic building, featuring a central courtyard surrounded by nine rooms, was erected in level K-4. In Area M, an elaborated building of level M-4 was found. All the above finds relate to the Iron Age I. While the Iron Age II remains have been found in Area K, L and H. remains of domestic buildings, each consists several phases, were found. Two palaces were also found here. The building is nearly square in plan, the wall to its east formerly considered to be the exterior eastern wall of the building, the casemate

rooms were uncovered to the west, and a stone structure to its south, which may have been part of the gatehouse, all seems to be part of the enclosing wall. Rows of small rooms extended along with the western side and back of the building, and one unite on the northeastern side apparently served as a kitchen.

In general, we may describe the process of Megiddo with the support of the archaeological finds: at first a small Israelite village, then a Philistine center, again an Israelite village and finally a local administrative city of a kingdom whose center was Jerusalem; there also shows the foreign architectural elements during the 10th century B.C.E., until during the 9th century B.C.E. the Omrides turned the city into a major military and administrative base [2]. The excavation results during the transition period indicate not only the gradual process of the urban settlements', the growth of the Israelite territory could also be deduced.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of settlement patterns at Tel Rehov, Tel Yoqne'am, Tell Ta'annek, and Megiddo during the transition from Iron I to Iron IIA (early 10th to late 9th century BCE) reveals a coherent and continuous process of socio-political development in the Jezreel Valley. Rather than supporting models of abrupt cultural or political rupture, the archaeological evidence points to a trajectory of gradual, uninterrupted growth, marked by the evolution from unfortified villages to complex urban centers with planned architecture, industrial infrastructure, and defensive systems.

This study highlights three key aspects of the transition:

1) **Continuity in Settlement:** All examined sites show stratigraphic continuity and progressive architectural development, indicating long-term occupation and localized socio-economic stability throughout the period.

2) **Regional Distinctiveness:** The material culture and settlement forms-such as the non-pillared buildings at Tel Rehov and the phased fortifications at Yoqne'am-reflect a distinct northern Israelite identity, diverging from highland settlement patterns.

3) **Territorial Consolidation:** Megiddo's transformation into a fortified administrative center by the 9th century BCE exemplifies the valley's strategic importance in the formation of the Israelite monarchy, particularly under the Omride dynasty.

By adopting a reconciled chronological framework (10th–9th century BCE), this study bridges the gap between High and Low Chronology models and aligns archaeological sequences with historical events such as Shoshenq's campaign. The Jezreel Valley thus emerges not as a periphery, but as a core region in the territorial and political consolidation of early Israel. Future research should further explore inter-site dynamics and external influences-such as Phoenician or Egyptian contact-that may have shaped the valley's unique developmental path.

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