

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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The site of Yesodot (Khirbet Umm el-Kalkha) was situated on a strategic point along the northern bank of Nahal Soreq, close to important routes linking the central and southern coastal plains with the Judean Shephelah and Mountains, such as the Jerusalem–Beth-Shemesh–Yavne Yam road and the Timnah–Ekron–Ashdod road (Dorsey 1991: 186–189). The Israel Antiquities Authority’s (IAA) Route 3 survey, followed by three salvage excavations conducted at the site by Y.G. Archaeology Ltd, the Israeli Institute of Archaeology and the IAA revealed occupation layers dating to the following periods: Pre-Pottery Neolithic, Chalcolithic, the Middle and Late Bronze, and to a lesser extent the Iron II and Byzantine (Dagot 2004; Dagan, Barda and Golan 2009; Paz and Nativ, in preparation).

This report has focused on the settlement remains of the MB and LB periods, unearthed by Y.G. Archaeology Ltd under the auspices of the Hebrew Union College, on the margins of a more extensive settlement, as established initially by the IAA survey and substantiated by our excavation and by other excavations in the area.

That said, the findings of the Y.G. Archaeology Ltd excavation—the architectural remains, the pottery workshop, the ceramic assemblage, and the lithic assemblage—afford us the opportunity to make some general observations and conclusions, and to discuss some issues about the nature of the site and its regional setting during the MB and LB periods.

Summary of the Archaeological Context

At least two buildings were unearthed and a pottery workshop that included a kiln, installations and a waste pit. The two buildings were of the ‘courtyard house’ type (cf. Ben-Dov 1992). The poor preservation state of Building B1 precludes

any involved interpretation, but this structure was probably of one storey (as implied by the width of the walls). Within were at least 4–5 rooms and possibly one or two paved courtyards adjacent to the southern side. The majority of the Building B1 pottery dates to the LB, although a small quantity of MB material was also found. Building B2 was also a one-storey structure, with at least one main room, two subsidiary spaces in the eastern and western wings, and a possible paved courtyard at the west end of the building. L338 was probably associated with this courtyard. The majority of the pottery in this building is from the MB period, although LB pottery was also found.

The pottery workshop—which included at least two kilns (one dug by Dagot [2004]), subsidiary installations and waste pits—was located in the eastern part of the excavated area, close to a meander of Nahal Soreq (which was probably exploited as a clay and water source). All of the above implies that the excavated area (Area B) was, at least in part, an industrial area on the margins of the settlement. The fact that this pottery workshop was situated on the periphery of the habitation makes sense, considering the potential fire hazard, heat, smoke, and dirt that such work produced, as well as the necessity to be close to raw materials and fuel (Wood 1990: 33). The ceramics recovered from this workshop—mainly from its waste pits—date to the MB period (mainly MB I and II). The potters’ kiln had a rounded shape and was of the vertical type (*ibid.*: 26–33). As was mentioned above an additional kiln, probably of the same type, was unearthed by Dagot (dated to the MB I), ca. 4.0m to the north. This suggests that the industrial area extended to the north beyond the limit of the excavated area. Another such kiln from the Yesodot vicinity, also dated to the MB I, was excavated on Nahal Soreq’s northern bank,

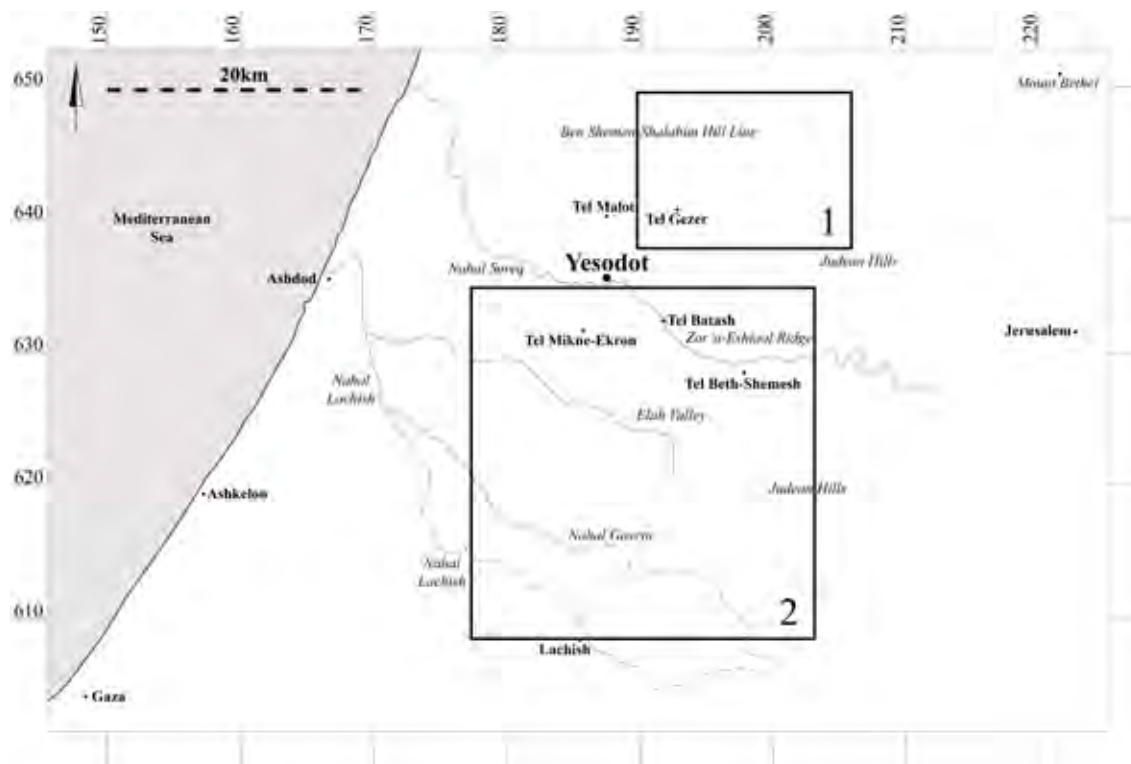


Fig. 10.1. Map of tangent survey areas: The Ayalon Valley and Environs Survey (1) and the Judean Shephelah Survey (2).

ca. 2.0km east of Yavne-Yam (Singer-Avitz and Levy 1992). No settlement was found in association with this kiln. Somewhat different MB kilns were found near Tel Qasile (Kletter and Gorzalczany 2001 [and see there for a partial list of MB kilns from the coastal plain]; Kletter 2006: 93-99). It seems that the Yesodot buildings (B1 and B2) were associated with this workshop; perhaps they were the potters' homes. Whatever the case, this possible industrial quarter was quite typical of the MB and LB periods.

The fact that no fortifications were found during the survey and in the various excavations suggests that the site of Yesodot was an open settlement during the MB and LB periods—probably a large village, though its actual size is not yet known.

Economy

The finds from Area B are probably not the best sample from which to reconstruct subsistence strategies, due to the limited area exposed and its

apparently specialized nature. Nevertheless, there is some evidence germane to the topic. Our first clue is the chipped stone assemblage. Although small in size, its sickle element presumably reflects an agrarian society. This is supported by the groundstone assemblage, which is mostly domestic in nature and includes mainly utilitarian grinding tools, probably for the processing of raw foodstuffs.

Our second clue to subsistence comes from the small faunal assemblage, which represents a minimum of two cattle, one goat or sheep, one pig and perhaps a chicken. These few surviving remains suggest that the inhabitants of Yesodot probably maintained livestock for secondary products, such as meat and milk.

Our third clue, the pottery workshop, indicates that some of the inhabitants were specializing in crafts. Through exchange, these would have been providers of such products as food.

This leads us to some circumstantial evidence relating to the settlement's location. The close proximity of Yesodot to important routes between

the coastal plain and the Judean Shephelah and Mountains may have afforded the Yesodot inhabitants the opportunity to practice commerce in one form or another—that is, to sell or exchange their local products with merchants passing along the roads. This could be one explanation for the presence of imported ware, such as that from Cyprus.

Relative Chronology (Table 10.1)

The lack of a clear-cut stratigraphy necessitates reliance on relative chronology—i.e. comparing the pottery assemblage with well-dated assemblages from neighboring sites.

The pottery assemblage of MB I Yesodot has good parallels from Apehek Phases 2–3, Lachish Level P6 (parallel to Apehek Phase 3), and Gezer Strata XXII–XXI. To that we can add also the Ashqelon moat deposit Phases 14–13 (presumably parallel to Apehek Phases 2–3 according to Stager [2000, Stager *et al.* 2008]). These parallels suggest that the Yesodot settlement was founded in the MB I (generally dated to ca. 1950–1750/30 BCE¹), although not in its earliest phases. The pottery assemblage of MB II has good parallels from Apehek Strata X XVI–XV and A XI, as well as Lachish Levels P 5–4, Gezer Strata XX–IX, and Tel Batash XII–XI (the latter to a lesser extent, due to the limited nature of the assemblage).

Despite the stratigraphic difficulties, therefore, by correlating our assemblage with those of the above-mentioned sites we propose that Yesodot was occupied from the MB I through MB II (the later generally dated to ca. 1750/30–1600/1580 BCE). It seems that at some stage during the MB II or III, or even during the transition to the LB I, the site experienced decline and was probably abandoned, as implied by the few sherds of the MBIII/LB I. A similar phenomenon of decline towards the end of the MB period has been observed at other sites, such as Apehek and Lachish, to mention but two (cf. Bunimovitz 1995: 320-324; Ilan 1995: 314-315).

The LB II pottery assemblage from Yesodot has good parallels in Apehek Strata XIII–XII, Gezer

Strata XVI–XV, Tel Batash Strata IX–VII, Tel Miqne-Eqron Strata IX–VIII and Lachish Levels P 2-1, S 3-1, and Fosse Temple II. This suggests that after the late-MB/early-LB decline, Yesodot was re-established or experienced some measure of rejuvenation during the LB I or early LB II. At some time during this latter period the site was finally abandoned, an impression strengthened by the absence of cup and saucer vessels, for example (Uziel and Gadot 2010).

The Settlement and Its Regional Setting

As mentioned above, the Yesodot settlement was situated in a fertile valley, on or close to several routes. Further details on the setting of the site and the wider region have been revealed by two major surveys conducted in close proximity to Yesodot: The Ayalon Valley and Environs Survey (Shavit 1992) and the Judean Shephelah Survey (Dagan 2001). An additional survey, carried out by the IAA along Route 3, which actually led to the salvage excavations at Yesodot, has not yet been published and its results are as yet unknown.

Ayalon Valley and Environs Survey

This survey area lies north and northeast of Yesodot (Shavit 1992). The southern portion of the area directly borders the Yesodot vicinity and therefore is particularly relevant to our discussion. During the MB period the area witnessed an increase in the number of settlements (as was the case in the coastal plain) and a developed settlement hierarchy. This hierarchy was comprised of three tiers: large sites such as Gezer, together with five medium-sized settlements (at least one in each geographical sub-unit), and 17 smaller settlements (Shavit 1992: 120-121). But there is uncertainty as to how much of this settlement hierarchy dates back to the MB I (Yasur-Landau and Samet 2004: 25). One of the reasons for this is the fact that during the survey only a few sites could be securely dated to this period.

The excavations at Gezer have revealed massive public buildings of the MB I (Dever 1986:19-20),

¹ The chronology used here is based on Bietak (2002).

Table 10.1. Relative chronology in relation to Yesodot.

Period	Yesodot Area B	Aphek	Ashqelon	Gezer	Batash	Tel Miqne-Eqron	Lachish
LB III	?	XI	--	--	--	--	Fosse Temple III, P1, VII-VI
LB II	+	XIII-XII	XVIII	XVI-XIV	VII-VI	IX-VIII	P2, S3-1, Fosse Temple II
LB I	?	XIV	XIX	XVII	X-VIII	X	P3, Fosse Temple I
MB III/LB I	+	--	--	XVIII	--	X	
MB III	?	--	XX	XIX	--	--	--
MB II	+	X, XVI-XV, A, XI	XXI	XXI-XX	XII-XI	Phase 13	P5-4
MB I	+	Phase 3	XXIII	XXII	--	Phase 13	P6
		Phase 2	XXIV				--

which suggest urbanizing processes, with the implication that the city was already maintained a central place function. There is no doubt that from the MB II onwards Gezer was the major urban center which controlled its hinterland.

The transition to the LB saw a decline in the number of settlements. By contrast with the previous period, the southern part of the area under survey (the area that lies directly north of Yesodot) was scarcely settled, while the northern sector was more densely settled. As in the MB period, the area's settlement hierarchy was comprised of three tiers: the largest settlement, Gezer, serving as a hub for three medium-sized and eight smaller satellite settlements (Shavit 1992: 128-129).

The Judean Shephelah Survey

This survey area lies south and southeast of Yesodot (Dagan 2001). In contrast with the coastal plain region, which witnessed an increase in settlement numbers (as perhaps did the Ayalon Valley), the Judean Shephelah was scarcely settled in the MB I period, with settlement numbers reduced to 13 (surveyed). To date, only one of these (Tell Beth-

Mirsim) was fortified. As expected, most sites were located near rivers or streams (Dagan 2001: 137).

During the MB II–III the Judean Shephelah experienced an increase in settlement numbers. This may have been due to an expanding population and immigration east from the more densely populated coastal plain. At least 24 MB II–III settlements were counted in this region, of which seven were fortified—among them Tel Batash and Tel Beth Shemesh, which were the closest major settlements to Yesodot. In contrast to the MB I drainage-focused settlement pattern, the MB II–III saw the establishment of sites and habitations along valleys edges, hills, mountain slopes, and other new environments. During this period the settlement hierarchy appears to have been comprised of at least two tiers—a large fortified center surrounded by small, unfortified, satellite agrarian settlements. There is of course a possibility of further tiers—perhaps a larger polity center which controlled a territory of which this survey area was only a part.

The MB III/LB I transition saw the demise of the MB urban culture. Settlement numbers were reduced across Canaan and, like the Ayalon Valley, the Judean Shephelah was no exception. However,

during late LB I and early LB II, this region, too, regained some prosperity. At least 25 settlement sites were counted in the survey, of which 15 were categorized as urban centers. It seems that here too the settlement hierarchy was now comprised of three tiers—a larger center, surrounded by medium-sized villages and smaller agrarian satellite sites.

The numbers, sizes, and structures of MB polities in the Shephelah region are not known for certain, and there is little scholarly agreement about those polities' nature. Models are based primarily on archeological data and to a lesser extent on historical documentation (such as the Egyptian execration texts). Burke (2004: 214-228) argues that the Yesodot area is the northeastern border of the Kingdom of Ashkelon—a polity of four tiers, with Ashkelon acting as the major political center. Under this political center were other large fortified settlements which controlled their own hinterlands, in which medium and small unfortified satellite settlements were located. According to this model, the Yesodot area was probably controlled by the fortified urban center at Tel Miqne-Ekron.

Dagan (2000: 147) argues that the political organization of the LB carried on that of the MB. According to this hypothesis most of the Judean Shephelah would have been under the control of two major cities: Tell es-Safi/Gat and Lachish. However, Dagan also offers the possibility that the area was divided to smaller polities.

Uziel *et al.* (2009: 234-239) have suggested two models of socio-political organization in the region between the Yarkon and the Soreq valleys. The first is the gateway/central place model, according

to which the region was divided into two polities—northern and southern. In the north Aphek functioned as an inland center, while her gateway site presumably was situated at Jaffa. In the southern polity Tel Miqne-Ekron functioned as the inland center, with Yavne-Yam presumably functioning as gateway. In this model the Yesodot settlement—ca. 2.0km northeast of Tel Miqne-Ekron—was part of the southern polity.

The second model suggested by Uziel envisions a single polity encompassing the entire Yarkon-Soreq region. The settlements in this postulated polity were arranged in an interesting pattern, with urban sites located around the periphery and rural settlements in the center. Under this model, Yesodot was not situated in the center, but rather close to the southeastern border of the polity, and was not exclusively agricultural in nature but rather had other economic functions due to the settlement's proximity to Tel Miqne-Ekron.

During the subsequent LB period the sociopolitical structure of the Shephelah was influenced by Egypt, which controlled most of Canaan. As in the MB, the Shephelah was probably divided into several city-states; the number and territories of the polities is also a bone of contention (Bunimovitz 1989, 1995; Finkelstein 1996; Na'aman 1997; Jasmin 2006). According to these the area of Yesodot was under the control of one of two city-states—Gezer or Tell es-Safi/Gat. Since Nahal Soreq seems to have been the natural border between the territories of these polities, we tend to accept that Yesodot was part of the kingdom of Gezer in the Late Bronze Age.

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