Ancient Western Asia Beyond the Paradigm of Collapse and Regeneration (1200–900 BCE)

Proceedings of the NYU-PSL International Colloquium,
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Edited by

Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault, Ilaria Calini,

Robert Hawley, and Lorenzo d'Alfonso

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Identity politics in a buffer zone: A sociopolitical view from the Iron Age IIA Hula Valley

Yifat Thareani, The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology – Hebrew Union College; NYU Tel Aviv

Towards the end of the second millennium BCE, the last Egyptian soldier left Egypt's governmental centers in Canaan. The end of the imperial era of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1150 BCE; henceforth: LB) marked the beginning of a gradual process that lasted some two hundred years, through the Iron Age I (ca. 1150–900 BCE; henceforth: IAI)—during which the former Canaanite city-states gave way to a bricolage of towns and villages that were ultimately consolidated on a regional basis under the rule of well-established territorial kingdoms—until the Iron Age II (ca. 900–537 BCE; henceforth: IAII).[1]

In response to the disappearance of the previous imperial order from the political map of the ancient Near East, and given the autonomous nature of the Syro-Canaanite society that was determined by local factors, studies such as that of Masetti-Rouault (2001, 5–8, 127–33; 2009, 142–43), Kühne (2009, 54) and Bonatz (2014, 205–06) have emphasized the importance of regionalism in exploring IAII Syrian culture.

Parallel to and separated from this scholarly trend, intensive archaeological work conducted in sites across the southern Levant have highlighted various regional mechanisms that were active in the formative period of the IAIIa (see for example the work of Arie [2013] on the Jezreel Valley; Panitz-Cohen and A. Mazar [2009] on Beth Shean; Zarzecki-Peleg [2005] on the Upper Galilee).

Characterized by a distinct geographical and ecological environment, and situated between the future kingdom of Aram-Damascus to the northeast, the kingdom of Israel to the south, the Phoenician coastal city-states to the northwest, and the Ammonite kingdom to the southeast, the Hula Valley provides a good case study for deciphering the social, political, and cultural engines that were at play in the creation of regional identities through history (fig. 22.1).

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1. Apart for some reservations, this study accepts the basic historio-archaeological critique over the traditional view and takes after the Low Chronology framework (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2007; 2009).

Figure 22.1. Map of main sites in the Hula Valley and northern Palestine during the IA. Drawing by Noga Zeevi.

A classic buffer zone and an important gateway, the Hula Valley has the potential to illuminate the sociopolitical dynamics that generated the process in which former Canaanite city-states, which were characterized as small politico-regional units, consolidated into ethnic territorial kingdoms.

Studying the ways sociopolitical structures were developed, navigated, and combined in the regional culture of the Hula Valley during this formative period, is fundamental not only for understanding the valley's history but also for purposes of comparison with other regional cultures. In this framework, the archaeological data, epigraphic sources, and geopolitical considerations will be integrated by looking at well-documented parallel processes that took place in similar geopolitical conditions in the preindustrial era.

The Hula Valley: Geopolitical background and history of occupation

Situated between Mount Hermon and the Golan plateau to the east and bounded by the steep Naphtali hills to the west, the Hula Valley is bordered by the Sea of Galilee to its south and the Valley of ʿIjon to the north (fig. 22.1). Apart from the three main sources of the Jordan River that flow into the upper valley, there are additional perennial water sources and springs in the area (Greenberg 2002, 11–18; Feibel, Goren-Inbar, and Frumin 2009, 23–27).

Until the early twentieth century CE, the heart of the valley was dominated by Hula Lake and swamps, resulting in harsh conditions for the local population. Human settlement was concentrated at the margins of the valley, near the springs and streams. Extensive marshlands caused most of the valley floor to be covered by a thick layer of rich alluvium. Given the availability of water, the gradual slopes, the fertile soil, and the climate, it is likely that ancient Hula inhabitants used irrigation in order to intensify cultivation and ensure consistent yields (wheat, barley, vegetables, papyrus). But alongside these multiple ecological advantages, the valley presented significant obstacles to human settlement. Included among these were regular floods that damaged crop yields and fruit trees and swamps that were rife with malaria. Consequently, the area along the lakeshore remained unsettled until the mid-19th century CE (Karmon 1953, 4–6; Greenberg 2002, 18–23; Zwickel 2007, 165, 170).

Yet, in spite of its marginal nature, the importance of the valley in antiquity derived from its strategic location and proximity to several overland routes. Two roads crossed the valley to the west and east of the lake, connecting it with the main trade route to the north, leading to Tyre and the Phoenician coast. Another east-west road linked the region with the Gilead to the southeast and Damascus farther northeast (fig. 22.1).

In order to understand the modes by which sociopolitical structures evolved, operated, and integrated into the regional culture of the Hula Valley and in order to isolate the sociopolitical mechanisms that were active in the creation of local identity in the Hula Valley, a survey of the settlement continuum of the region during three relevant periods (the LB, the IAI, and the IAII) will be presented. It shall be followed by an evaluation of the sociopolitical implications of the archaeological record from IAIIa contexts and will be supplemented with ethnohistorical parallels. Finally, an anthropological model contextualizing the position and rule of local autonomous elites in formative periods will be suggested.

Late Bronze Age

Located along the important route that linked Egypt with the Beqaʾ Valley, the Hula region was situated on a branch of the major network of roads that traversed Canaan between the 15th and the 13th centuries BCE and that enabled economic and cultural contacts between Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt.

Throughout most of the LB, the settlement layout of the Hula Valley and the nearby Upper Galilee were dominated from the west by the magnificent Canaanite city-state of Hazor (Tell el-Kedaḥ; fig. 22.2).[2] First discovered in the excavations of Yigael Yadin (1958–1968), Hazor of

2. Material culture correlates between these areas in this formative period supports the assumption that the two regions share economic and sociopolitical contacts.

the LB "…the head of all those kingdoms" (Joshua 11:10) was the largest city-state in Canaan expanding over an area of 80 ha (Yadin et al. 1958, 1–5; Ben-Tor 1993, 594–606).

In continuation with the Middle Bronze Age (henceforth: MB), Hazor of the LB (Strata XV–XIII) absorbed nearby villages into its fortified lower city and, with enough population, was capable of producing its own agricultural surplus. By maintaining its institutions—a palatial compound and a temple on the acropolis—evidence from Hazor attests to a shift favoring the ruling elite and the cultic institutions that crossed the lower city from south to north; all were shaped in the spirit of the Syro-Canaanite cultural tradition of the Bronze Age (Yadin 1972; Beck 2002, 58–93; Ornan 2017). Cuneiform tablets found at Hazor attest to the existence of an archive and to correspondence among Canaanite elite members during the LB (Horowitz and Oshima 2006, 80–81), as well as providing evidence for bulk imports on overland routes, especially of cedar beams from the north, fragments of Egyptian sculptures, figurines, and numerous silver and bronze plaques, indicating that Hazor of the LB was a thriving metropolis, a chief craft center in the Levant (Connor et al. 2017; Ornan 2017).

Hazor's rich material culture draws a picture of a wealthy northern outpost of the Canaanite city-states system that was well integrated into the Syro-Mesopotamian tradition of the north and that held vast cultural, diplomatic, and commercial contacts with the dominant cultures of the Bronze Age. Its ruling dynasty manifested its power and international prestige through ceremonial institutions on the acropolis and rampart and access to luxury materials and crafts far beyond the ability of its lesser neighbors (Zuckerman 2008; 2010; Ben-Tor et al. 2017; Greenberg 2019, 315–17).

Residing some 35 km to the northeast, Hazor's lesser neighbor in the LB, Tel Dan-Laish (Tell el-Qadi; Strata VIIIb–VIIa1), also continued its existence from the previous period. The MB core and rampart served as the fortifications of the LB town that included various public and private structures (Ben-Dov 2011, 375–78, figs. 3a, 10, 16, 21a, 44a, 49, 54, 77, 81a, 98a, 108, 139, 146, 153).

Additional evidence for the existence of a Canaanite network of local elites can be drawn from the stone corbelled chamber tomb (the so-called Mycenean tomb) discovered at Dan, which contained nearly a hundred complete vessels, local and imported (Biran and Ben-Dov 2002, figs. 2.8–2.9, 2.19–2.20). It exhibits an unusual investment of labor and skill in its construction which is also associated with the Canaanite network of local elites (Greenberg 2019, 338).

LB Hula Valley sites were small administrative settlements that housed the local governor, his family, and a small group of officials, while sedentary and nonsedentary groups resided in the surrounding villages and nearby areas. Commerce of the type reflected in the site of Hazor displays reciprocal gift exchange among peers, while trade in imported goods was significant to all parts of Canaanite society and was in demand for ritual or other ceremonial contexts, as attested in the stone corbelled ("Mycenean") chamber tomb at Tel Dan (Greenberg 2019, 336).

By the second half of the 13th century bce, Hazor was destroyed by a fierce conflagration that burnt red the mudbrick walls of its palace and temple in the acropolis, in addition to the monumental temples and gates in the lower city, which suffered a desecration of its

Figure 22.2. Map of main sites in the Hula Valley and northern Palestine during the LB. Drawing by Noga Zeevi.

cultic objects. The remaining parts of the city were abandoned in a gradual process of what Zuckerman called "crisis architecture" and explained as an ever-growing rage among the local dwellers of Hazor who suffered from an increasing economic burden (Zuckerman 2007, 25 with references).

Iron Age I

Following a period of abandonment between the second half of the 13th century and the 11th century BCE, the Hula Valley and Upper Galilee witnessed the founding of a small, limited occupation.

Other than the biblical account, which constitutes a biased source for the reconstruction of historical events in the IAI (Amit 1990; Naʾaman 1994), the lack of contemporary paleographic sources stresses the important role of archaeology in the creation of a balanced image of this period.

Excavations and surveys in the Hula Valley and Upper Galilee reveal that in the course of the IAI, the tells Dan, Abel (Tell Abil al-Qamú), Hazor, Kadesh, and Rosh were used as political and economic centers surrounded by smaller sites (fig. 22.2; Ilan 1999, 16–17; 2019, 635–38).

It seems that the fierce destruction of the previous Stratum XIII at Hazor was intended to be physical, symbolic, and psychological—all at the same time. Nothing of the previous Syro-Canaanite glory of the city-state survived and a new settlement was founded.

Built on the acropolis and consisting of meager architectural remains that were used as foundations for the mudbrick superstructure or for structures made of perishable materials, the new settlement at Hazor (Strata XII–XI) was surrounded by dozens of storage pits and installations that were distributed across the acropolis (Ben-Ami 2013).

Two cultic areas identified as *bamah* and *masseboth* reflect an open-air ritual that took place on high-elevation sites, where offerings were placed around a single unworked standing stone (*massebah*) that served as the focus of an aniconic ritual activity (Ben-Tor and Geva 1989, 28, 77; Ben-Ami 2006, 131–32, fig. 22.1; Ben-Ami and Ben-Tor 2012, 7–51). Zuckerman suggested that the immense and still visible remnants of the violently destroyed Canaanite Late Bronze Age monumental edifices were used as part of the "ruin cults" that were performed by remnants of the Canaanite indigenous population that fled from the site in the 13th century BCE and kept traditions regarding of the once thriving city and its violent end. Alternatively, these rituals might be attributed to the new inhabitants of the site, the "proto-Israelites," who were deeply impressed by the sheer size of the still visible remains on the acropolis. She concludes that the IAI "ruin cults" at Hazor should be viewed as part of a "landscape of memory" of the Iron Age inhabitants of northern Israel (Zuckerman 2011, 392–93).

The social development of IAI society in the Hula Valley was gradually evolving over a long period of time. Analysis of the architectural evidence from Dan revealed an unfortified town, densely built with well-defined buildings separated by open spaces, and surrounded by grain pits, indicating a fluctuation between nuclear and extended family compounds, with houses that might have been grouped into lineage neighborhoods. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence for the social hierarchy at Dan and other IAI sites is limited. Archeozoological analysis showed an increasing consumption of beef and a lesser use of sheep and goats for herding within the household framework, indicating that land-owning became more important than practicing pastoralism (Wapnish and Hesse 1991; Ilan 1999, 144–47; 2008; Greer, Fulton, and Wapnish 2019).

A small building identified as a sanctuary that was found in IAI levels at Dan (Stratum V) was associated with adjacent metal workshops and *masseboth* (Strata V–IVb). These finds attest to production and use of metals across several excavated areas at Dan, hence not concentrated in the hands of a specific lineage (Ilan 1999, 132–33, 144).

The nearby site of Abel-Beth-Maʿacah lies on a high plateau overlooking the northern Hula Valley, where the valley of Marj-ʿayyun narrows sharply and drops down into the Hula basin (fig. 22.1). This point forms the southern gateway of the Beqaʿ Valley, a great fertile depression wherein water is found in abundance. The site's proximity to the modern border between Israel and Lebanon has prevented any systematic modern excavation there for a long time. Consequently, the information on the site's size and morphology during the Iron Age is quite
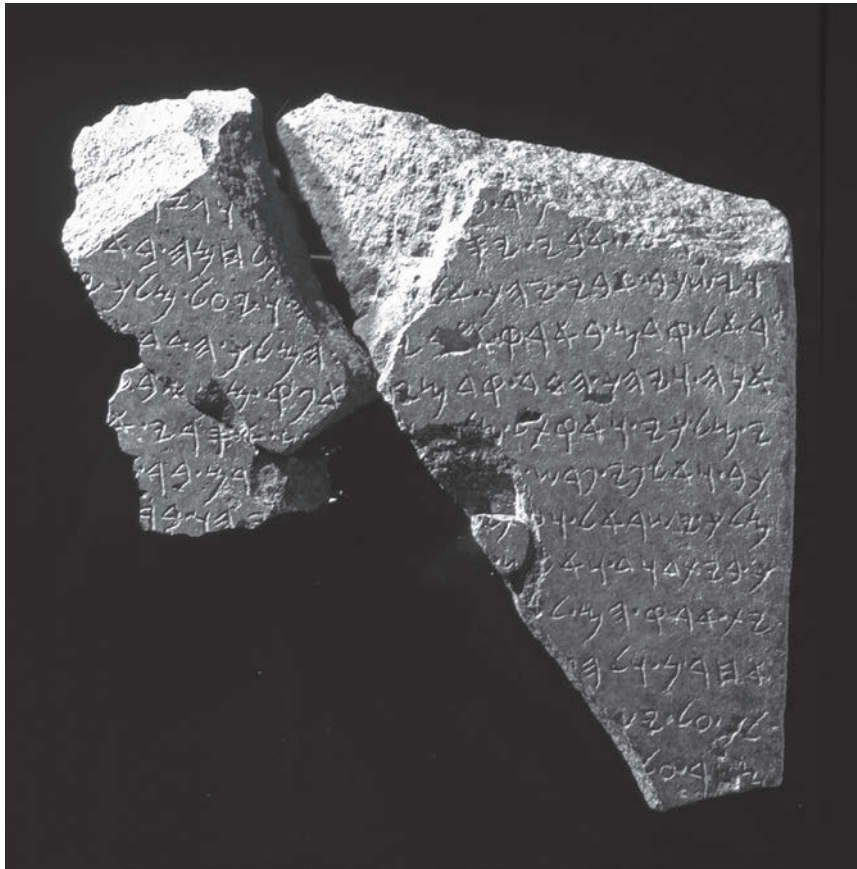
Figure 22.3: The Hazael Inscription from Dan. Photographed by Zeev Radovan.

limited (Dever 1986, 210, 216–17). New excavations conducted in recent years at Tel Abel have the potential to shed light on this important IAII site (Panitz-Cohen, Bonfil, and Mullins 2012; Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil 2015; Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018).

Counted among the discoveries at Tel Abel was an elaborated IAI settlement (Strata A3–A2), the remains of which have been found in all excavated areas. The settlement included a structure with cultic vessels dated to the early phase and a building complex with a stone pavement and a large courtyard in the later (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2018, 150–51, figs. 9–12; 2019). Of special interest is the exposure of an architectural complex (Stratum A2), where large, well-built buildings, most likely public, yielded evidence of storage, metallurgical, and cultic activity (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019, 235, figs. 3–7).

A direct outcome of the collapse of the LB mining and production centers in Cyprus was a shortage of copper and tin, as well as a paucity of internationally exchanged luxury and prestige goods (Liverani 1987, 71), which stimulated the adoption and wide distribution of iron knives and small objects in the early IAI (Waldbaum 1978; McNutt 1990).

The local society of the IAI Hula Valley was based on a mixed agrarian agricultural economy that practiced horticulture and pastoralism along the hilly margins. A great variety in pottery provenience attests to a complex and wide-ranging exchange system. In this period, the

valley was part of a regional subsystem of an intraregional trade network (self-contained) that included northern coastal outlets and perhaps the southern flank. In this system, the Hula Valley sites were used as places in which agricultural commodities were brought in from the countryside, stored, and redistributed (Ilan 2019, 635–38).

Iron Age II

During the long period of time that marked the IAII, the Hula Valley and its environs experienced a dramatic change in their settlement layout and sociopolitical structure.

Several central sites dominated the valley landscape at that time: Tel Dan, a cult center in the north; Hazor, an Israelite administrative center in the west; the Aramaean city of Bethsaida (et-Tell) to the south of Lake Hula and on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee; Chinnereth (Tell el-ʿOremeh) on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee; Abel-Beth-Maʿacah to the north, forming the southern gateway of the Beqaʿ Valley; and ʿIjon (Tell ed-Dibin) in the valley of Marj-ʿayyun, between the Litani and Hasbani rivers, on the road leading from Sidon to Damascus (fig. 22.1).

In the transition from the IAI to the IAIIa, sites such as Dan and Abel Beth Maʿacha continued their existence with some modifications in the settlements' size and scope.

Major political shifts that had taken place in the areas surrounding the valley during the 9th century BCE determined its fate as a transitory zone. The consolidation of the small territorial kingdoms of Aram-Damascus to the northeast, Ammon and Moab to the west, Israel to the south, and the Phoenician city-states of Tyre and Sidon to the northwest elevated the geopolitical importance of the region and brought about a series of conquests, destructions, and resettlements.

In this tumultuous chain of events, the northern valleys often switched hands in what can be considered a love-hate relationship between the kingdoms of Aram-Damascus and Israel. There were times when the two kingdoms joined hands and played active roles in a local Syro-Palestinian coalition organized against the Assyrian Empire, as illustrated in the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE; Naʾaman 1976, 89–91, 97–106). In other, less peaceful times, the Syro-Palestinian alliance gave way to local clashes over disputed territories. Echoes of these hostile relations between the Aramaeans and the Israelites can be heard throughout the biblical stories, especially the battle accounts described in the historiographic Book of Kings (I Kings 20; Kraeling 1918, 80–81; Tadmor 1962, 119; Lipiński 2000, 372–85; Naʾaman 2005, 461–74).

Outstanding evidence for the rivalry between the two nations is presented in the Hazael Inscription from Dan (842 BCE), in which the Damascene king boasts of his victory over the kings of Israel and Judah (fig. 22.3; Biran and Naveh 1993; 1995; Naʾaman 2000; Athas 2003).

Hazael's account has greatly influenced the archaeological discourse and various destruction layers in the southern Levant have been associated with the conquests of the Aramaean king accordingly. These destruction layers include: Dan IVa (Biran 2002, table 1.1; IVb; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2009, 268), Hazor IX (Finkelstein [1999, 59]; Finkelstein and Piasetzky [2007, 270–71]; *contra* Yadin et al. [1958, 23] and Ben-Tor [2000, 11] who related the destruc-

tion of Hazor VII to Hazael. More recently, Ben-Ami [2012, 235] suggested that IAIIa Hazor was strong enough to withstand a lengthy Aramaean siege), Rehov IV (A. Mazar et al. 2005, 254), Beth Shean S1 (A. Mazar 2005, table 2.2), Jezreel compound (Naʾaman 1997, 126), Taanach IIb (Finkelstein 1998a, 216), Megiddo Va–IVb (Finkelstein 1998b, 170), Gezer VIII (Finkelstein 2002, 285) and Safi IV (Maier 2004; Sharon et al. 2007, 39).

By conquering both the archaeological and the historical awareness of scholars, the impression that Hazael left has regulated the creation of two dominant views. The first is a traditional view that credits the reliability of the biblical historiographic account and includes north Palestine within the borders of the IAIIa Omride kingdom. According to this view, Upper Galilee and the Hula Valley were generally under the control of Samaria, except for a short Aramaean occupation during the reign of Hazael—soon to be terminated by an Assyrian intervention (Unger 1957, 75–84; Yadin et al. 1958, 23; B. Mazar 1962, 114–15; Biran 1994, 165–209; Ben-Tor 2000, 11; Hafþórsson 2006, 218, 222, 229, 235ff.; A. Mazar 2007, 159–60).

The second approach credits Hazael's words as commemorated in the inscription from Dan. Advocates of this view argue that Hazael's territorial ambitions went far beyond the borders of Damascus; the northern territories were annexed by Damascus and remained under Aramaean control throughout the entire IAIIa. According to this view, it was Hazael who initiated the elaborate building programs we see in the cities of Dan and et-Tell (Naʾaman 1997, 125–27; 2000; 2012, 95; Arie 2008, 37; Hasegawa 2012, 141; Finkelstein 2013, 127–28; Berlejung 2014, 352).

Situated at the heart of a disputed territory, amidst the Damascene-Israelite conflict, the IAIIa Hula Valley saw the growth of elaborate central sites that dominated the landscape. Despite being subjected to frequent conquests and destructions, the sites of Hazor, Abel, and Dan continued their existence into the IAIIb (the 8th century BCE). Architectural remains and material culture assemblages from these sites attest to the investment of an elaborated administration and of the organization of highly skilled labor.

Hazor (Strata VIII–V) was encircled by a magnificent casemate wall and gate system. A tripartite building, most likely used as a royal storehouse, occupied the central part of the acropolis, and an impressive fortress stood to the east. A well-built water supply system included a vertical shaft 30 meters long, supported by revetment walls, and an impressive staircase was connected to a sloped tunnel and rock-cut reservoir that provided the city with sweet ground water (Yadin et al. 1958, 17–19, 30–45; plates CLXXIV, CLXXVI; 1960, 47–51, plate CCV; Ben-Tor and Geva 1989, 105–12, 190–95, plans XXIV, XXXIII; Geva 1989, 27–42, plan 7).

Against the above-mentioned background and limitations, Tell Abel's size during the IAII is estimated at ca. 14 ha, with a large citadel or fortress reconstructed at the top of the mound during that period (Dever 1986, 220–21, fig. 2).

Situated in the valley of Marj-ʿayyun, on a rich oval-shaped plain between the Litani and the Hasbani rivers and to the north of the Hula Valley, the important role of the site of ʿIjon (Tell ed-Dibin) was most likely dictated by its location on the road leading from Sidon to Damascus. Surveys in the region have yielded pottery from various periods including the IA, but no systematic excavations have been carried out here yet (Mullins 1992, 387–88).
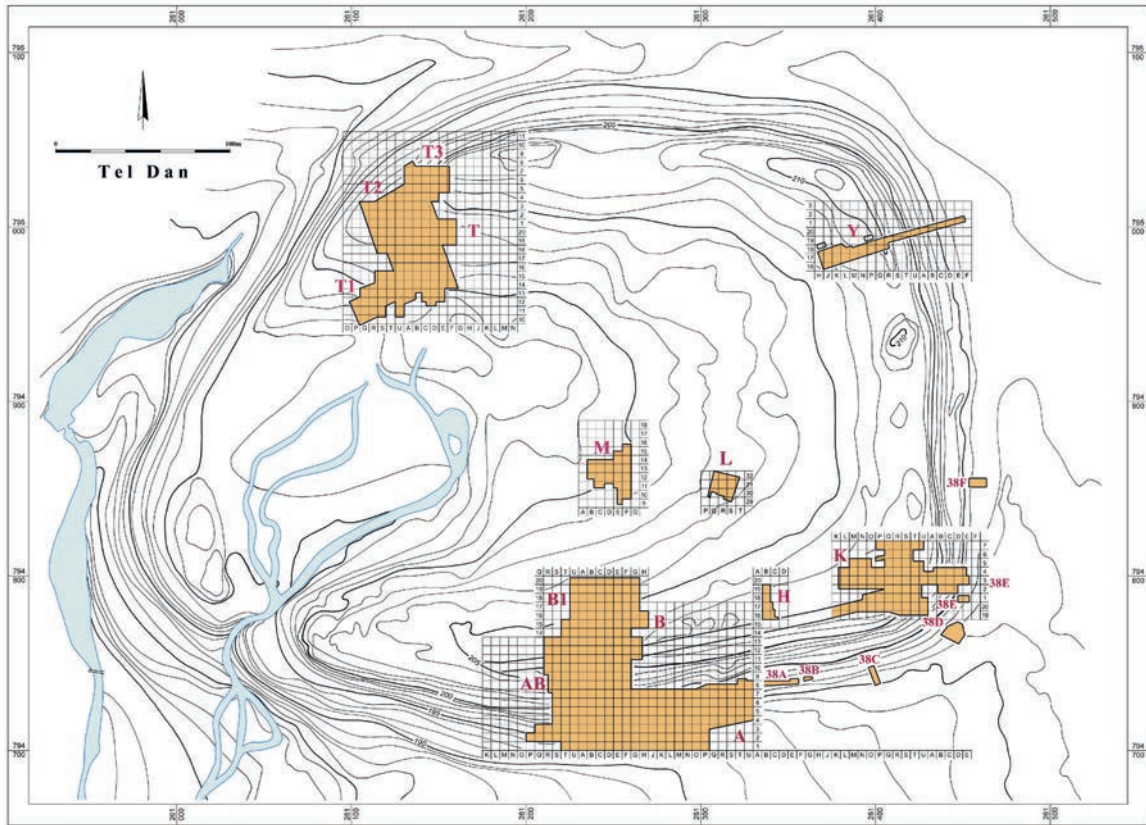
Figure 22.4. Tel Dan: general plan of the excavated areas. Drawing by Dov Porotsky and Slava Mirsky.

An archaeological survey conducted during the 1970s to the north of the Hula Valley, in the Lebanese Beqaʻ, shows IAII remains detected in 15 sites in the southern Beqaʻ. Thirty additional sites have been detected in the northern Beqaʻ (Marfoe 1995, 165–66, maps 26–27; 1998, 224–27), although their chronological subdivision was not confirmed.

At Dan (Strata IVa–IIa), the IAII city covered large portions of the 20-ha mound and encompassed public and domestic areas (fig. 22.4). The city of Stratum III was fortified by large unworked basalt boulders on which was built a mudbrick superstructure, coated with plaster, and supported by buttresses. The southern side of the city was occupied by an elaborate gate complex consisting of an inner (four-chambered) gate with two towers in front, beyond which was set an outer gate (fig. 22.5; Biran 1994, 235–45). A broad piazza was located in front of the city gate and a paved road led from a lower to an upper gate, and from there to a Sacred Precinct (Biran 1993, 327–30).

To sum up, the relatively intensified IAII occupation at the Hula Valley seen in figure 22.1 includes a relatively high number of settlements (25–30) covering a total built-up area of 55–75 ha (Stepansky 1999, 96; 2008, 279–82, fig. 13). Given that the total occupied area of the Hula Valley during the IAII was 55–75 ha, following a density coefficient of 25 inhabitants per ha,
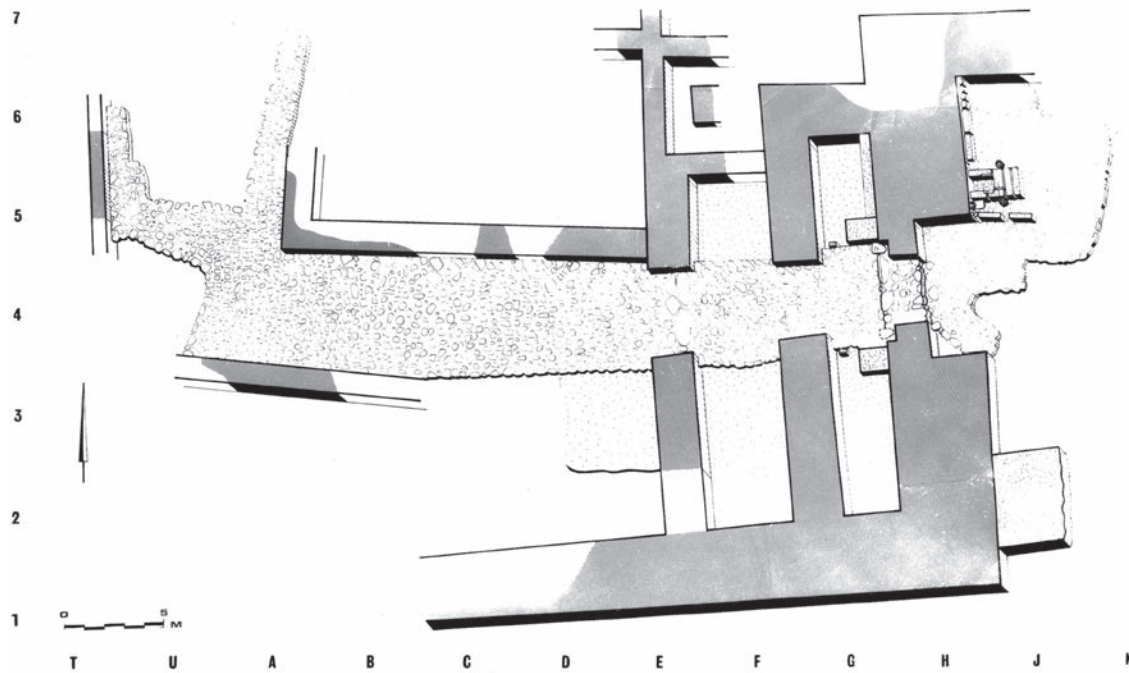
Figure 22.5. Tel Dan: plan of the four-chambered gate complex, Area A, Stratum III. Drawing by Gila Cook.

the local population just prior to Tiglath-pileser III's campaign in 733 bce has been estimated between 13,750 and 18,750 people.[3]

In light of the prosperous settlement system that characterized the Hula Valley and its environs on the eve of the Assyrian invasion in 733 bce, one is intrigued by the geopolitical considerations and sociocultural powers that made possible the transition of this disputed area from a local-regional network of Canaanite city-states in the LB to the patronage of the territorial kingdoms characterized by superregional systems in the IAII. Deciphering the social and cultural tissue of Hula Valley sites during the IAIIa requires delving further into the archaeological context of the period. The site of Tel Dan will be used as a case study.

Exploring the cultural makeup of the Hula Valley in the Iron Age II: A sociopolitical view from Tel Dan

In the face of scarce inscribed material from IAIIa Hula Valley sites, material culture plays a key role in explaining the mechanisms of cultural change. Following that, ethnohistorical and anthropological studies of equivalent processes can be used as supplementary resources. Those shall be applied in the process of identification of the sociopolitical and economic forces that were active in the Hula Valley in this formative period.

3. The former is the calculation of the total built-up area suggested by Stepansky (1999, 96); the latter was estimated by Broshi and Finkelstein (1992, 50).

Yifat Thareani

Figure 22.6. The Canopied Structure, view from northeast, Area A, Stratum III. Photographed by Avraham Biran.
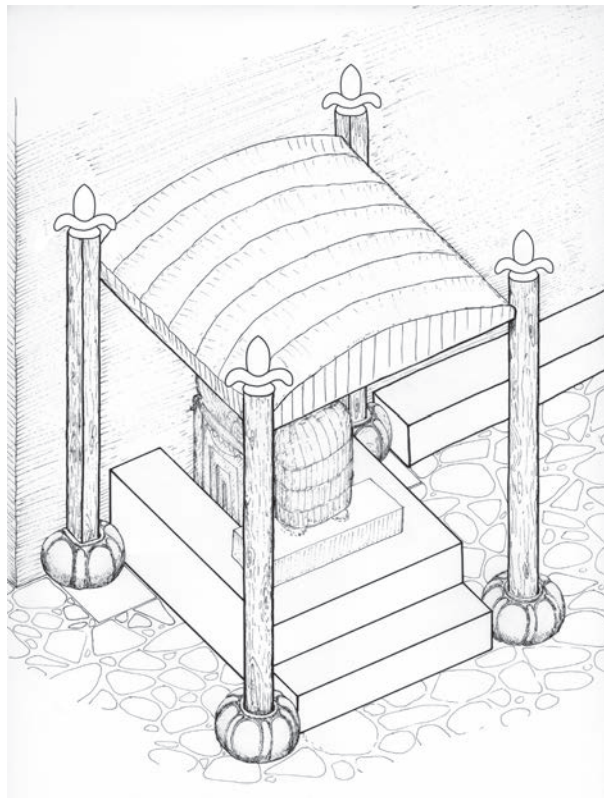
Figure 22.7. The Canopied Structure, a suggested reconstruction. Drawing by Noga Zeevi.

A major player in the regional setting of the Hula Valley, the archaeological evidence from the IAIIa layers at Tel Dan has the potential to illuminate the nature of the sociocultural change that the valley went through during the transition from the "…Bronze Age Levantine palace prestige economy, en route to the ethnic kingdoms of the Iron Age" (Greenberg 2019, 347). The brief forthcoming description is by no means an attempt to encompass the entire assemblage typical to the IAIIa or to discuss in-depth its cultural function and ties, which will be published elsewhere. Rather, it shall be presented here on a scale that is relevant to the current subject.

A first step towards understanding the sociopolitical dynamics that were active in the consolidation of the region should be the deconstruction of the mute archaeological assemblage into its political and social components, hence creating a clear distinction between the political rule over Dan and the ethnic orientation of its IAIIa inhabitants (for further information on the method see Thareani 2016, 173–75).

Evidence for political rule

Hazael's dedicatory inscription found at Dan commemorates a political conflict between Aram-Damascus and Israel in the mid-9th century BCE, followed by Aramaean conquest and Damascene control over Dan (fig. 22.3; Biran and Naveh 1993; 1995; Na'aman 2000; Athas 2003). Yet, the identity of the rulers of Dan on the eve of the Aramaean invasion and the extent of the building activities that Hazael initiated in the city are not mentioned..

Various public features from IAIIa Dan reveal the existence of diverse architectural and artistic traditions: a well-elaborated fortification system built of local basalt, which is alien to the typical Israelite casemate wall (fig. 22.5); a Syro-Mesopotamian style canopied structure (figs. 22.6 and 22.7), with its column bases fashioned according to Phoenician and Luwian traditions; lotus capitals recalling the ivories from Arslan Tash (fig. 22.10); and Hazael's Inscription (fig. 22.3). Most of these elements can be found in the Syro-Mesopotamian sphere (for parallels and additional references see Thareani 2016, 176–80).

But what is also significant is that several public architectural features from Dan were fashioned in the typical Israelite spirit: the ashlar-built platform of the Sacred Precinct (fig. 22.8); the nature of the cultic remains and the Proto-Aeolic capitals (fig. 22.10)—all are reminiscent of contemporary IAII sites in the kingdom of Israel (Thareani 2016, 181–82 with references). On the background of the mixture of northern and southern traditions displayed in the monumental architecture from Dan, we are compelled to admit that the archaeological evidence from IAIIa Dan is not clear in identifying the ruler of the city on the eve of the Aramaean conquest.

Evidence of ethnic orientation

The presence of an indigenous Aramaean population across north Palestine has been dated back as early as the IAI (Ilan 1999, 212–13; Na'aman 2012, 95–96; *contra* Pakkala 2010; 2013). Various objects found in sites across the northern valleys attest to the existence of local popula-

Figure 22.8. The ashlar-built platform (Bamah B) below the Hellenistic platform, Area T. Note the use of the headers-and-stretchers building technique. Drawing by Noga Zeevi.

tion elements with Aramaean ethnic affiliations.[4] Various objects found at IAIIa Dan—ceramic vessels (fig. 22.11), mirrors (fig. 22.12, 4–5; Biran 1999, 52; Ornan 2006, 309), names and inscriptions (fig. 22.12, 22.6; Avigad 1968, 42; Biran 1994, 255, 260–64, figs. 213, 215, 218)—imply the presence of a strong Phoenician and Israelite ethnic component, alongside a population of Syrian identity.

A remarkable reference from Joshua 13 indicates the ethnic composition of IAII Hula Valley sites, "Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshurites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day."

Aimed at describing Israel's failure to inherit the autochthonic inhabitants of the land "until this day," this passage, narrated in far-away 7th-century Jerusalem, denotes a clear biblical concern with the existence of an indigenous non-Israelite population in this buffer zone (Geoghegan 2003, 215–16; Na'aman 2012, 89–90, 97).

The local community at IAIIa Dan was composed of diverse ethnic groups: former Canaanites, Syrians, and Phoenicians—some with roots in sedentary society, others following a seminomadic lifeway.[5] This bricolage existed in the Hula Valley and adjacent territories long before the rise of the kingdoms of Aram-Damascus and Israel. From it developed an original mosaic of material culture with distinctive characteristics in which memories of its various ethnic origins were embedded. Accordingly, material culture assemblages from IAIIa Dan portray

4. See for instance a jar bearing an Aramaic inscription "לשקיא" at En Gev (B. Mazar et al. 1964, 27–29) and a jar bearing an Aramaic inscription "לשקינמש" at Reḥov (A. Mazar and Aḥituv 2014, 303).

5. For a parallel phenomenon that took place in the valley during the first half of the 20th century ce see Livne (1996, 183–88).

a complex picture in which diverse northern cultural influences coexisted with continued local and southern traditions (Thareani 2016, 185; 2019a, 272–74; 2019b).

Demographically, IAIIa Hula Valley was characterized by a strong autochthonous Canaanite component that had resided in the valley forever mixed with some Syrian and Phoenician elements as well as with groups originating from the hilly regions to the south. When coupled with the unique ecological setting and the strategic location of the valley, this exceptional sociopolitical heterogeneity produced a regional culture that was about to dictate the nature of the interaction between local inhabitants and external political powers that were consolidating in the areas to the northeast and south.

As opposed to the traditional scholarship that argued for the political conquest of the northern valleys by the territorial kingdoms of Samaria (House of Omri) from the south (Unger 1957, 75–84; Yadin et al. 1958, 23; B. Mazar 1962, 114–15; Biran 1994, 165–209; Ben-Tor 2000, 11; Hafþórsson 2006, 218, 222, 229, 235ff.; A. Mazar 2007, 159–60) or Damascene (House of Hazael) from the northeast (Na'aman 1997, 125–27; 2000; 2012, 95; Arie 2008, 37; Hasegawa 2012, 141; Finkelstein 2013, 127–28; Berlejung 2014, 352), stands the idea that the heterogeneous society of the Hula Valley belonged to an independent geographical unit—a 'Ma'achtite autonomy.

First suggested by Na'aman (2012), the assumption that during the IAIIa the region stood as a separate geopolitical unit was based upon textual and historical considerations that called for the examination of its archaeological probability. Recent archaeological analysis conducted by us at Tel Dan (Thareani 2016; 2019) and by our colleagues at nearby Abel Beth Ma'acha (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins 2019, 247) adopted this "autonomous approach" and tried to shed light on the material culture manifestations of this geopolitical unit during the formative period. But how exactly to understand the autonomous nature of the city-states of Geshur and Ma'acha? What characterized these polities in their relations with the outside and inside worlds? How, during the 9th and the 8th centuries BCE, were the Geshurite and the Ma'achatite finally integrated with the neighboring territorial kingdoms?

The autonomous nature of local elites in buffer zones: An anthropological look

Both city-states of Geshur and Ma'acha appeared to be in areas that were geographically marginal, ecologically challenging, and culturally distinctive. The disappearance of the imperial powers and local Canaanite city-states who had dominated the Bronze Age political map and who dictated economic policy for nearly a millennium made room for local formations and agents who became active and generated a political and cultural change. Given that political and economic autonomies are difficult to prove archaeologically, deciphering the sociopolitical dynamics that were at play in the city-states of the Hula Valley and its environs requires a definition of the region.

By definition, I mean going beyond the currently accepted geographical descriptions that can be often found in the scholarly literature (Greenberg 2002, 11–18; Feibel, Goren-Inbar, and Frumin 2009, 23–24, 26–27), and trying to place the Hula Valley and its surroundings in a broader anthropological context.

Of the various terms and definitions that current anthropological archaeology has produced and used for the ever-growing field of frontiers and boundaries (Green and Perlman 1985; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Parker 2006; McCarthy 2008), the term "buffer zone," though often used in the literature and applied in various case studies (e.g., Hickerson 1965; Otzen 1979) has not been sufficiently defined. Yet the following definition and characteristics seem to fit well the case of the Hula Valley during the IAIIa.

On a descriptive level, buffer zones were conceptualized as uninhabited or sparsely settled areas that separate two or more competing rival entities. Hence, buffer zones are to be viewed as contested no-man's-lands rather than as areas in which conditions of the physical environment alone prevent or discourage human settlement. On a more functional level, such zones can be viewed as reducing interaction and conflict between competing and antagonistic groups through the simple mechanism of spatial distancing and, at least hypothetically, can be regarded as resource reservoirs that, by preventing or reducing utilization of certain areas, play a role in maintaining a balance between human populations and the resources upon which they depend (DeBoer 1981, 366).

Strategically located buffer zones ease the creation of contacts between communities and neighboring regions. Though, in this scenario, a society that tends towards fragmentation rather than unity may be created (Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001, 320). How then to overcome the challenges of fragmentation and produce a unified identity?

In their article from 2005, Shelach and Pines presented several characteristics that are typical of this process (Shelach and Pines 2005, 222–24). When coupled with conclusions drawn from the study of Schortman, Urban, and Ausec (2001) on identity formation, a potential solution to our problem appears. Below is a summary of the main points adjusted to the current case study.

1. The foundation of an early state does not mean the creation of a separate distinct entity, but the unification of preexisting entities under one political umbrella.

2. Providing that individuals and groups always had more than one identity, different identities have the ability to overlap or even contradict one another.

3. The tendency towards political and cultural fragmentation is balanced by integrative powers such as: economic means (creation of contacts and interregional dependence), flexibility of borderlands in light of annexation or conquest of new territories, shared cultural heritage, and religion.

4. A special place in this process is reserved for elite groups that have the ability to adopt a changing set of allegiances, moving from one court to the other in exchange for respect or other material benefits.

5. During the formative periods, the political system changes in a dramatic way, yet the local tradition does not disappear and is characterized by continuity.

6. The new political reality and preservation of local traditions enable the creation of a new synthetic identity that combines local traditions and beliefs in a new framework (continuation of the familial institutions and the local religion).

7. Changes do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are influenced by regional processes that take place among communities and cultures and in regions with similar cultural foundations and political ambitions.

8. Transformation of ideology to material culture occurs at this stage. Material ideas and memories are expressed visibly. Nevertheless, archaeological expectations from the situation should be based on the integration of various cultural traits rather than on the presence or absence of one cultural element or the other.

In sum, a strong connection that existed between the creation of early states and the development of local identity enables the challenges of fragmentation to be overcome and encourages the creation of a unified shared identity. The ability to convince people to look beyond sectorial considerations turned out to be critical for the creation and balance of the new political entity. It is achieved by empowering the place of local elites through symbols. Providing that local elite groups in buffer zones acted as the main agents in contacts with foreign representatives, these groups were able to maintain economic autonomy and to exercise a monopoly on the local access to symbols and raw materials (Covey 2000, 122; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001, 323–24).

In what way is the autonomous nature and cultural negotiation of local elites in buffer zones relevant to IAIIa Hula Valley?

Local autonomy among elite groups in the Hula Valley

Our interest in local autonomies in buffer zones stems from the need to socially and politically contextualize the archaeological evidence from the Hula Valley during the IAIIa, between the collapse of the great LB empires and the rise of the Neo-Assyrian global power. The growth of the two city-states of Geshur and Ma'acha and the role that they played in the state formation processes of the two rival neighboring polities that consolidated to the northeast and to the south can be tracked through the construction of cultural groupings from the available data and by modeling the sociopolitical contexts within which different categories of artifacts were moved across the Hula Valley in general and Tel Dan in particular (for the method see McCarthy 2008, 205).

A strong local presence in the material culture of IAIIa layers at Dan highlights the vital part that regionalism played in determining the geopolitical changes that took place in the region during this span of time. Archaeologically, the strong regional tendency is manifested in the intensive use and consumption of the typical Canaanite ceramic tradition as can be seen through the local IAIIa material culture assemblages from Dan (fig. 22.11)—all prevalent in contempo-

rary IAIIa ceramic assemblages in sites in northern Palestine such as Hazor X–IX, Beth Shean S-1, Yokneʻam XV–XIII, and Megiddo Va–IVb (table 2).

At the same time, various writing traditions, names, and luxury items that found their way into IAIIa assemblages at Dan reflect strong contacts with the Aramaean polity of Aram-Damascus to the northeast and the Israelite polity of Samaria to the south, suggesting the function of the Hula Valley as a buffer zone between two competing entities. In this area, material culture reflects sociopolitical dynamics of interaction and counteraction between these two rival yet neighboring polities, side by side with a strong local component.

If we are to follow the theoretical outline presented above, a special place in our explanation should be reserved for the part that local agency played in this dance. Here, ethnohistorical sources may provide supplementary information on equivalent processes that took place in the Hula Valley or in areas that were subjected to similar geopolitical conditions.

Throughout their history, the northern valleys have seen the rise of powerful tribal organizations that controlled a relatively small population spreading over vast territories.

One example may be drawn from the years that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, during which the British and the French mandates shared control over an area that belonged to the Beni Fadel tribe (fig. 22.9; ʻAbbāsī and Seltenreich 2007, 24). Geopolitical changes intensified the friction among tribal leadership faced with new challenges and demanded a renewed evaluation of the tribal strategy. Territorially, a political border separated the tribe from its land in a period when more and more Bedouins moved to permanent settlement, a trend that increased the economic burden and the need for solutions, some of which turned out to be violent (Al-Faour 1968, 397). Politically, the local leadership of the Hula Valley were forced to face challenges of economic survival, foundation of geographical control, and careful navigation among several political loyalties.

With power in their hands, tribal leadership negotiated a set of changing treaties by negotiating loyalty with different political powers present in the region, through redefining national and ethnic identities, and promoting the tribal economic and political interests. Recently, I showed that the political and social forces that were at play in the northern Hula Valley during the late 19th–early 20th century, when the Ottoman Empire was too weak to impose its rule and no major power ruled the region, share many things in common with the twilight period of the early 9th century BCE (Thareani 2019b).

Conclusions

Any assessment of the sociopolitical factors that led to the creation of local autonomous powers and the cultural negotiation and contacts of Hula Valley communities with the two rival polities that consolidated in Aram-Damascus and in the Samarian Hills shall consider local agency as a prime mover behind the political turmoil of the 9th century BCE events.

When integrated with equivalent processes, the above-mentioned example shows that, even in the absence of significant material culture expressions, local rulers of the Hula Valley could become quite influential in the political scene.
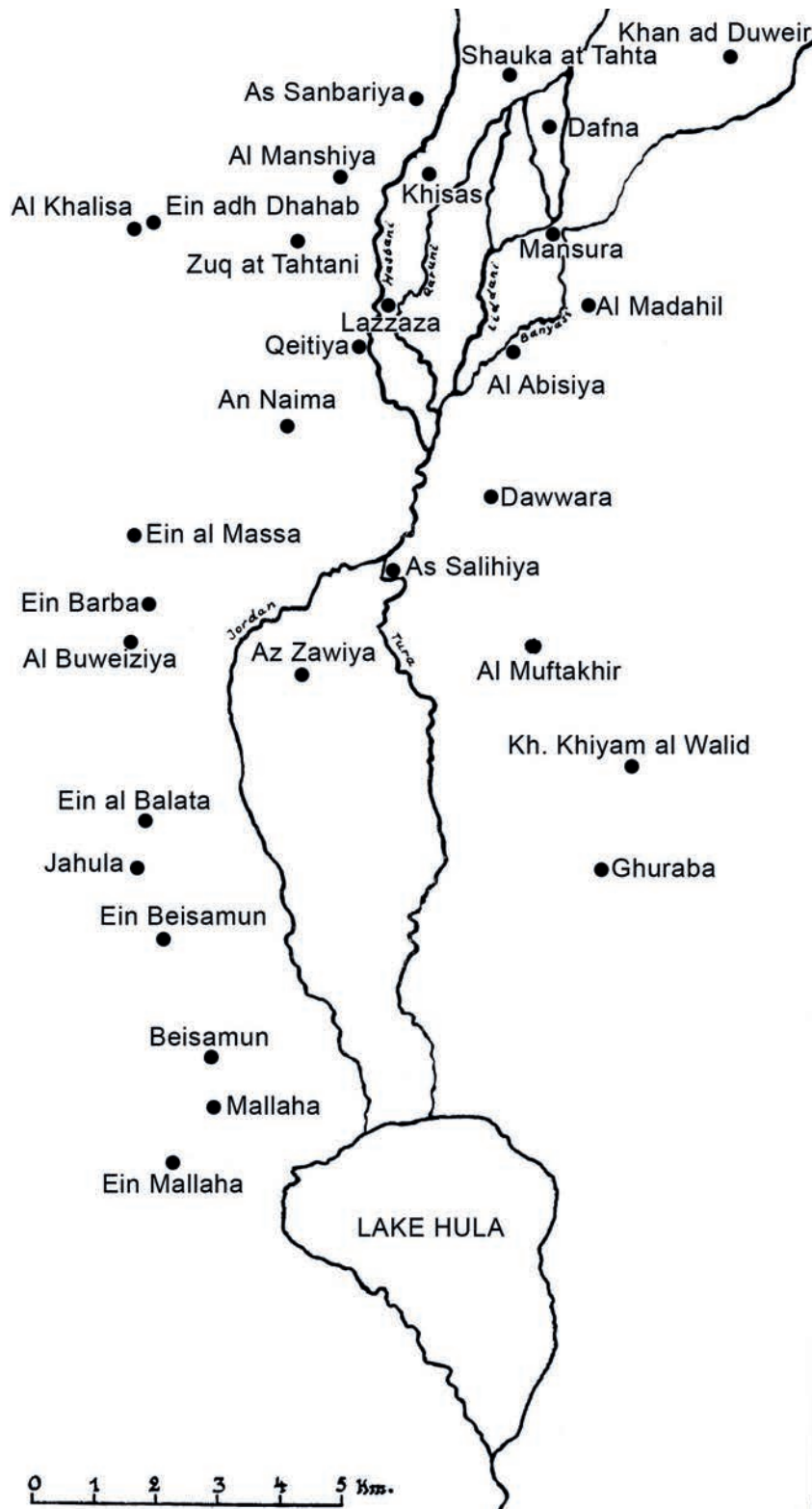
Figure 22.9. Map of the Hula Valley in the 19th century CE. Drawing by Noga Zeevi.

In the second half of the 9th century BCE, upon its conquest by the Aramaean troops of Hazael, a small town had already existed at Dan. This small town belonged to a local Maʾachatite formation consisting of Canaanite, Phoenician, Syrian, and other ethnic elements. Local elites, who ruled the autonomous formation, negotiated, constructed and navigated their recently-built identity sometimes by collaborating with the kings of Israel to the south, in other times through cooperation with the rulers of Aram-Damascus to the northeast. This, the Damascene ruler chose to symbolically place his famous inscription at the heart of a disputed land, in the small town that was critically important to his high political ambitions—Tel Dan.

Multiple ethnic identities were present at IAIIa Dan, a formative time that was open to the expression of opposing demands that were practiced in different social contexts in order to achieve complementary goals. Thus, local inhabitants of IAIIa Hula Valley were able to maintain several social identities at the same time. These were significant for achieving resources for their physical survival and social standing in a changing world when the territorial kingdoms appeared. Preservation of power was achieved, first and foremost, by defining the identity of local elites who gained control over manpower and resources in the Hula Valley and who manipulated its strategic location. While ceramic analysis clearly indicates continuation of local identity, which is reflected through the continuous production of local pottery in the Canaanite tradition, contacts with the outside world, the distant areas located to the north and south, were also maintained. These are expressed through the ability of local elites at Dan to import luxury products that attest to a high status and conspicuous consumption. Material culture assemblages found in IAIIa Dan can be thus defined as a clear expression of social strategies in the framework of which a new identity was formed by using symbols and by the adoption of new styles. Navigating their way in a changing world, local elites of autonomous regional polities of the Hula Valley maintained the continuity of old familial institutions and belief systems on one hand, while, on the other hand, they adopted a set of changing alliances and new social status. In this way, the foundation of the territorial kingdoms of Aram-Damascus and Israel, into which structures the northern valleys were later incorporated, did not mean the creation of a distinct state, but the unification of various ethnic groups and autonomic entities under one political canopy. This bricolage of ethnicities can also explain the natural built-in tendency of the kingdom of Israel towards political and cultural fragmentation—a trend that left its bloody marks on the tumultuous chronicles of the northern monarchy.

Acknowledgments

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Table 22.1: Selected columns and capitals, Iron Age II Tel Dan, shown in figure 22.10.

| No.	Object	Reg. No.	Area	Loc.	Str.	Context	Date
1	Lotus shaped capital	12802/2	T	2452	Mixed	In secondary use – a fill in a wall, dated to the Hellenistic period	-
2	Decorated capital	36043/2	T	9613	Mixed	In secondary use – a fill in a wall, dated to the Roman period	-
3	Lotus shaped capital	15622/1	A	5112	III	Destruction level of the gate complex	Mid-9th century
4	Pumpkin shaped stone	3317/1	A	48	III	Southwest corner of the Canopied Structure, *in situ*	Mid-9th century
5	Proto-Aeolic capital	15736/1, 2	A	5133	III	Destruction debris on the flagstone pavement in front the gate	Mid-9th century
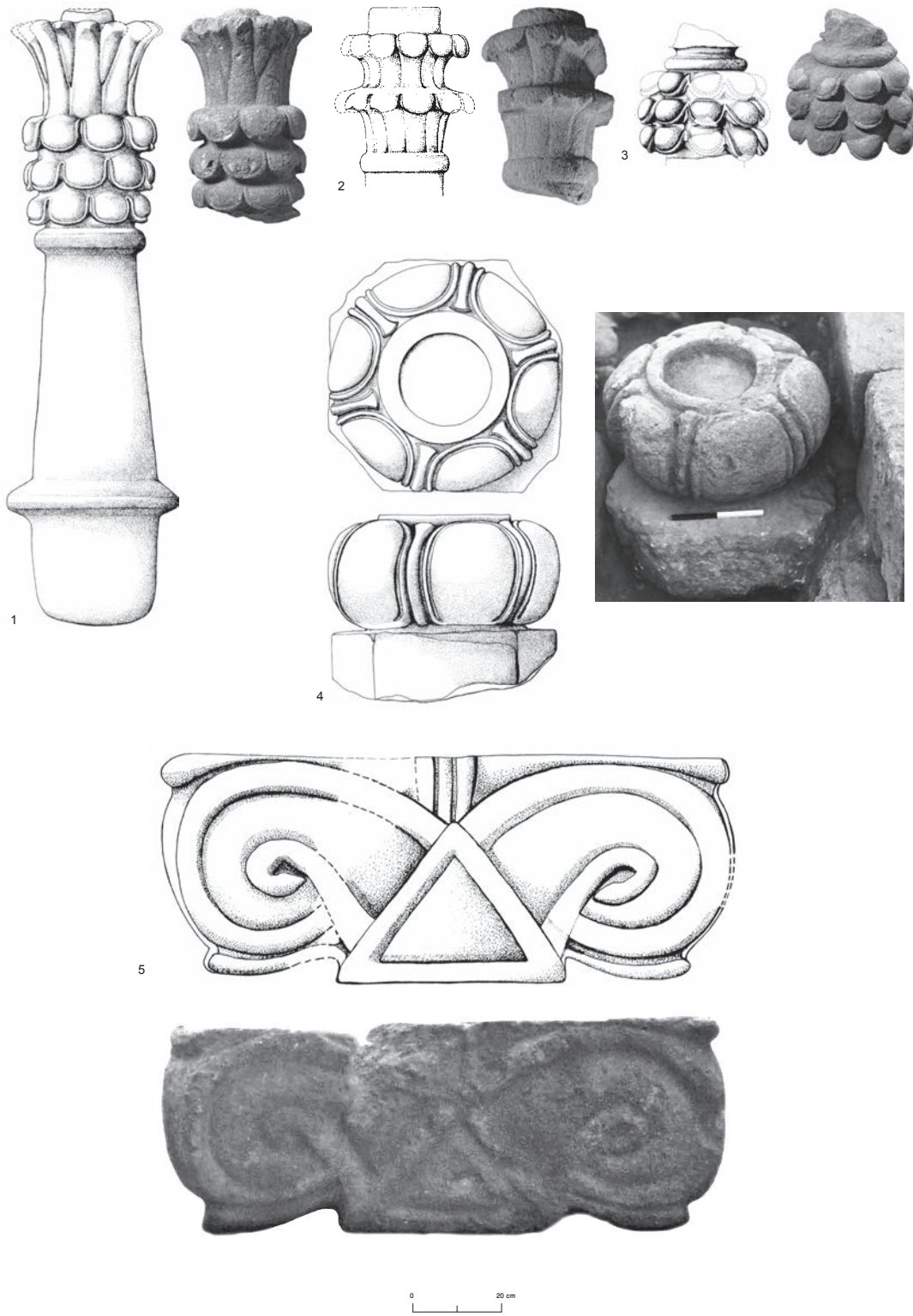
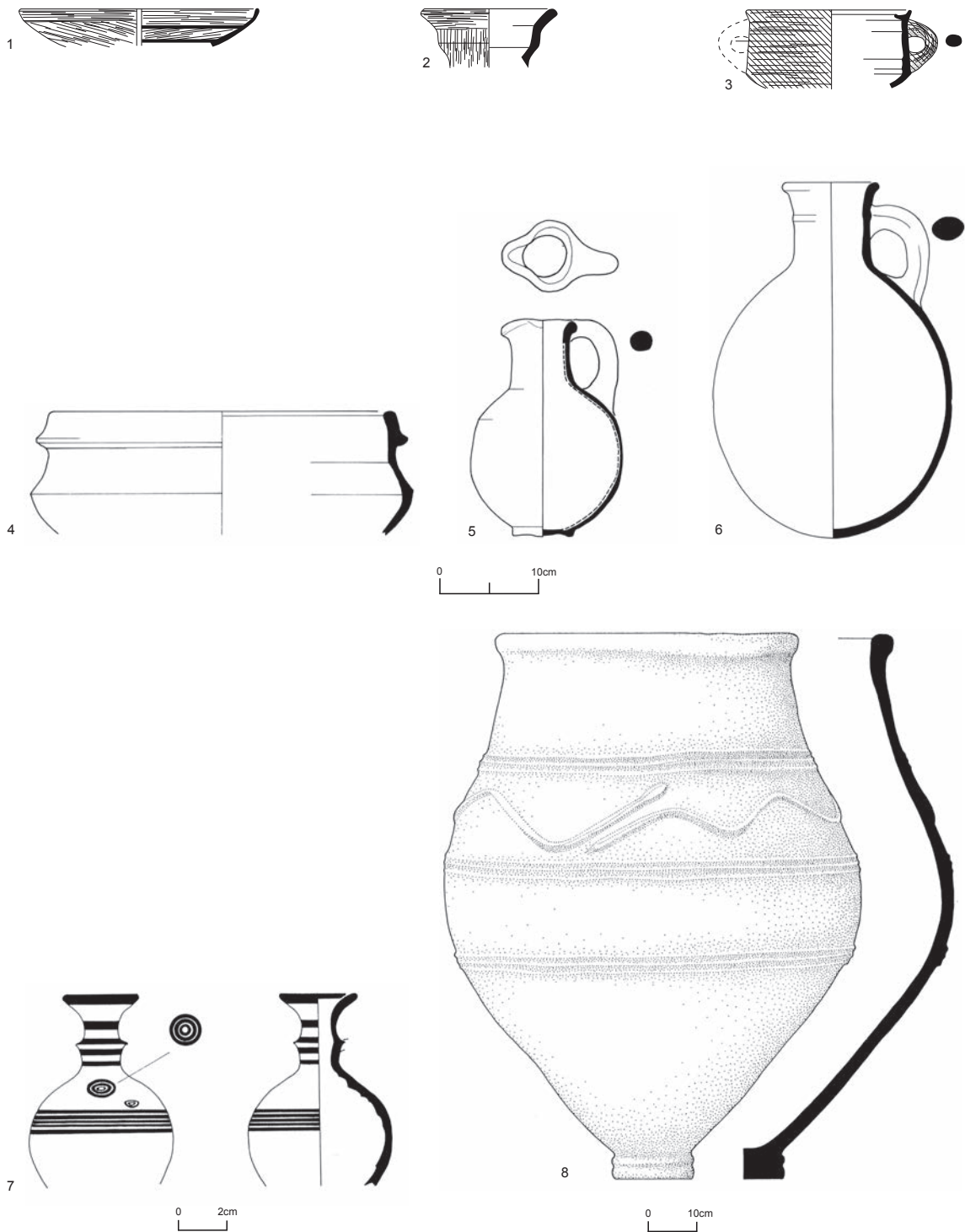Figure 22.10. Selected columns and capitals, Iron Age II Tel Dan.

Figure 22.11. Selected ceramic types from Stratum IVa at Dan.

Table 22.2: Selected ceramic types from Stratum IVa at Dan, shown in figure 22.11

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Loc.	Area	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl	817/1	176a	B	Round carinated shallow bowl with wild hand burnish	Hazor X (Yadin et al. 1958, CLXXIV, 2)
2	Chalice	9630/1	589	B	Red-slipped chalice	
3	Krater	20583/4	8174	M	Red-slipped and burnished krater with gutter rim	Hazor X–IX (Ben-Ami 2003, 125, Krater Type III); Megiddo VB–IVB (Arie 2013, K34)
4	Cooking pot	12830	2460	T	Cooking pot with pinched inverted rim	Hazor X–IX (Ben-Ami 2003, 127–28, Cooking-pot Types Ic); Megiddo VB–IVB (Arie 2013, CP31b)
5	Jug	12005	2246	T	Trefoil-rim jug	Hazor X–IX (Ben-Ami 2003, 135, Jug Type I); Megiddo V (Finkelstein, Zimhoni, and Kafri 2000, fig. 11.40:9)
6	Jug	12928	2506	T	Globular jug	Megiddo V (Finkelstein, Zimhoni, and Kafri 2000, fig. 11.40:8)
7	Juglet	11720	2094	T	Cypro-Phoenician Black-on-Red juglet	Hazor X–IX (Ben-Ami 2003, 145, fig. 29.8–9); Megiddo Vb-IVb (Arie 2013, BoR34)
8	Pithos			T	Snake *pithos*	

Figure 22.12. Selected objects and vessels, Iron Age II Tel Dan.

Table 22.3. Selected objects and vessels, Iron Age II Tel Dan, shown in figure 22.12

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Area	Loc.	Str.	Context	Date
1	Scepter/macehead	30123/1	T	9057	III	Under the stones of the altar	Mid-9th century
2	Anthropomorphic faces	12114/1	T	2311	III	On a cobbled pavement to the east of a travertine block structure	Mid-9th century
3	Decorated stand	12122/1	T	2311	III	On a cobbled pavement to the east of a travertine block structure	Mid-9th century
4	Bronze plaque with a worshipping figure	56897/1	A	5402	III	Hussot, Structure B	Mid-9th century
5	Bronze plaque with a deity riding a bull	56501/1	A	5451	III	Hussot, Structure B	Mid-9th century
6	Aramaic inscribed bowl "ltbhya"	-	-	-	III?	Surface	Mid-9th century
7	North Syrian Cypriote cooking pot	21161/1	M	8309	Ib	Atop a stone pavement	7th–early 6th century
8	Amphoriskos with a ring base and handles attached to the body	11721/2	T	2093	IVa	Among restorable vessels on a surface	Early 9th century