Stages in the Territorial Expansion of the Northern Kingdom

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Abstract
The article presents textual and archaeological evidence for three phases in the territorial expansion of the Northern Kingdom. In the initial, pre-Omride phase Israel expanded only into the Jezreel Valley. Under the Omrides, the territory of the Northern Kingdom covered the northern valleys as far as Hazor and the mountainous Galilee. In the first half of the 8th century BCE, Israel expanded further north, to the area of Dan and possibly beyond.

Keywords
Northern Kingdom, Israel, Aram Damascus, Omrides

Several years ago, in a joint article Nadav Na’aman and I reconstructed the boundaries of the territory of the Northern Kingdom in the time of the Omride dynasty. New archaeological data, especially in the realm of radiocarbon dating, and reevaluation of the results of old excavations and textual material, calls for a fresh treatment of this subject. In what follows I detect three stages in the northward expansion of the Kingdom of Israel:

3) For example, E. Arie, “Reconstructing the Iron Age II Strata at Tel Dan: Archaeological and Historical Implications”, Tel Aviv 35 (2008), pp. 6-64.
before the Omrides, during the reign of the Omride kings and in the early 8th century BCE.

**Introduction: The Northern Lowlands Before the Northern Kingdom**

The group of toponyms in the highlands north of Jerusalem mentioned in the Sheshonq I Karnak list (Beth-horon, Gibeon and Zemaraim) and the concentration of late Iron I/early Iron IIA settlements in the same area (e.g., et-Tell, Khribet Raddana, Khribet ed-Dawwara) seem to correspond to biblical traditions⁵ on the 10th century BCE Saulide territorial polity.⁶ Both the Sheshonq I list and the Book of Samuel’s description of the House of Saul attest to connections between the highlands north of Jerusalem and the area of the Jabbok River in Transjordan. The boundaries of the Saulide entity extending even further, over the entire northern hill country, can possibly be reconstructed from 2 Samuel 2:9⁷ and the tradition of a battle fought by King Saul on Mt. Gilboa near Beth-shean. The latter reference has no geographic or geopolitical logic if not based on a genuine tradition. The sites at the hub of this Saulide entity were abandoned during the early Iron IIA, that is, ca. 900 BCE, perhaps as a (not necessarily immediate) consequence of the Sheshonq I campaign and the possible expansion of the Jerusalem Davidic entity.⁸ The rule of the Saulide polity in the northern part of the central hill country (Shechem and the area north of it) could have been nominal, because of contemporaneous activity of Apiru-like strongmen such as the one hinted at in the difficult-to-date biblical story of Abimelech in Judges 9. When the Northern Kingdom emerged in the second half of the 10th century, the center of power had already shifted from the plateau of Gibeon to the area of Shechem.

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In the northern valleys the late Iron I, which covers the end of the 11th century and much of the 10th century BCE, is characterized by continuity of second millennium material culture; there are good reasons to suggest continuity also in the political-territorial city-state system. Among the main centers of this period one can count Megiddo, Tel Keisan, Kinneret and Tel Rehov. Hazor seems to have been inhabited in the mid-Iron I and deserted in the late Iron I and early Iron IIA. Not a single late Iron I center is known in the mountainous Galilee or the Golan.

The late Iron I centers in the northern lowlands came to an end in brutal destructions by fire. One of them (Kinneret) never recovered to its late Iron I size and prosperity; Megiddo was completely devastated and may have stood in ruins for a few decades. A large number of short-lived radiocarbon determinations from these northern centers suggest that the late Iron I system came to an end gradually, possibly in two waves of destructions—the first ca. 1000 BCE and the other somewhat later in the 10th century BCE. If this is the case, interpretations of these destructions as a result of a single military campaign or seismic event must be dismissed. This leaves us with only one possible cause—the expansion of the highlands Israelites. Dating these events between ca. 1000 and 930/920 BCE would put most of them in the time of the Saulide territorial entity and in the very early days of the Northern Kingdom. This scenario can support the description of the Saulide expansion as far as the Jezreel Valley in 2 Samuel 2:9; it would also explain the northern tradition on the battle of Saul on Mt. Gilboa, which seems to have reached Judah with northern refugees after 722 BCE.

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12) Finkelstein and Piasetzky, “Radiocarbon Dating and the Late Iron I”.
The Territory of the Northern Kingdom Before the Omrides

From the perspective of the biblical text, there are two possible indications of the extent of the Northern Kingdom’s territory before the Omrides: 1) the reference to the Jeroboam I cult at Dan (1 Kings 12:29); 2) the statement that in the days of King Baasha, Ben Hadad, king of Damascus, “conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-ma’acah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali” (1 Kings 15:20).\(^\text{13}\)

Scholars did not doubt the tradition of the Jeroboam I cult at Dan.\(^\text{14}\) Yet, Arie\(^\text{15}\) has now convincingly argued, based on the pottery evidence, that Dan was destroyed at the end of the late Iron I; that it was deserted during much of the Iron IIA, certainly in the early Iron IIA—the time of Jeroboam I; that it was rebuilt by Hazael in the second half of the 9th century BCE; and that it became Israelite for the first time ca. 800 BCE or somewhat later. This means that the tradition about the erection of the bamah at Dan is a retrospective from a reality of the first half of the 8th century BCE. Scrutinizing the biblical material, Berlejung\(^\text{16}\) has now reached a similar conclusion: “1 Kings 12:26-33* is a polemic dtr fiction that has no reliable historical information about the time of Jeroboam I, but reflects historical facts . . . of the time of Jeroboam II . . .”.

Scholars took the report on the Ben-hadad campaign in 1 Kings 15:20 as a description of a historical event that occurred ca. 885 BCE.\(^\text{17}\) Yadin\(^\text{18}\) proposed that the destruction of Hazor IX was inflicted by Ben-hadad in the course of this campaign.\(^\text{19}\) Yet, \(^\text{14}\)C results put the destruction of this stratum

\(^{13}\) Two stories ostensibly describing events in the 10th century BCE before the rise of the Northern Kingdom—Shema ben-Bichri at Abel-beth-Maacah (2 Sam 20) and the Joab census (2 Sam 24) were probably written against a later, 8th century background (see below).


\(^{15}\) “Iron Age I Pottery”.

\(^{16}\) “Twisting Traditions”.


significantly later, in the late 9th century BCE, and leave no destruction layer at Hazor for such a campaign. In fact, from the $^{14}$C perspective, the only destruction layer in the north that may fit a campaign in the early 9th century is that of Rehov V—a site not mentioned in 1 Kings 15:20. Indeed, the description of Ben-hadad’s campaign may have been adopted by the author of Kings from the account of the campaign of Tiglath-pileser III against the Northern Kingdom in 732 BCE (2 Kings 15:29). The two texts are written in the same genre and describe the same campaign path; they also mention several similar locations.

Archaeology testifies to significant activity in the Jezreel Valley in the early phase of the Iron IIA. Settlements such as Megiddo VB and Taanach IIA are the first to exhibit the characteristics of the late Iron IIA-Iron IIB material culture and hence can be seen as Israelite. In contrast, no evidence for the early Iron IIA exists in the upper Jordan Valley sites of Hazor, where Stratum X, which follows an occupational gap, dates to the time of the Omride Dynasty; Dan, which was deserted after having been destroyed in the late Iron I; and Kinneret, which was deserted or declined at the end of the late Iron I.

Under these circumstances, I would propose that in the early days of the Northern Kingdom, before the rise of the Omride Dynasty, its lowlands territories were restricted to the Jezreel Valley.

The list of cities taken-over in the course of the Sheshonq I campaign in the second half of the 10th century BCE seems to support this suggestion. In the hill country, the list mentions a group of sites in the highlands north of

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23) Arie, “Reconstructing the Iron Age II Strata at Tel Dan”.
27) For the date of the campaign see Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq”.
Jerusalem and another group in the area of the Jabbok River. In the north, the campaign reached the Jezreel Valley; the list refers to Megiddo, Taanach, Rehov, Beth-shean and Shunem. Megiddo yielded a fragment of a stele of Sheshonq I, unfortunately not found in situ. Sheshonq I could not have been responsible for the destructions in the Jezreel Valley in the late Iron I because: 1) at least some of these destructions are radiocarbon dated to before the highest possible date for his reign; 2) the radiocarbon evidence indicates a gradual demise of these cities and not a single destructive event; 3) there was no reason for a pharaoh who was probably interested in re-establishing Egyptian rule in the area to devastate a fertile valley that was the bread basket of the entire country; 4) it is illogical that Sheshonq I would establish a stele in a deserted Megiddo.

Combining these arguments with the radiocarbon evidence for the late Iron I/early Iron IIA transition, it is now clear that the pharaoh directed his campaign in the Jezreel Valley in the early Iron IIA. The circumstances of the destruction of the late Iron I system (above) and the material culture evidence (drastic change from the late Iron I to the early Iron IIA and continuity between the early and late Iron IIA) both indicate that in the early Iron IIA the valley had already been dominated by the north Israelites. In fact, it seems that the Israelite towns of the Jezreel Valley were a major target of the campaign. Therefore, the fact that Sheshonq I did not continue further north is telling. It seems to hint that at his time the lowlands territory ruled by the highlands Israelites was limited to the Jezreel Valley. In the late 10th century the territories further to the north, especially in the upper Jordan Valley, must have been dominated by Damascus.

When exactly during its early days did the Northern Kingdom expand to the Jezreel Valley? The answer to this question can be given only according to the absolute date of the earliest settlements in the valley that signal the appearance of north Israelite ceramic traditions. I refer to early Iron IIA strata such as Megiddo VB. This date can be verified according to the large body of radiocarbon results now available for northern sites, including two early Iron IIA layers (Rehov VI and Dor D2/8c). All Bayesian models available place the transition from the late Iron I to the early Iron IIA in the second half of the
10th century BCE.\textsuperscript{31} and a Bayesian model for six ceramic phases in the Iron Age puts the early Iron IIA in ca. 920-880 BCE.\textsuperscript{32} If one takes these pieces of evidence together, a beginning date for the early Iron IIA sometime in the second half of the 10th century seems to be a sufficiently careful estimate.

The character of the Northern Kingdom in its early days can be assessed according to two additional pieces of information: the nature of its capital and comparison to the rise of early territorial formations in other periods in the history of the Levant.

According to the Bible the first capital of the Northern Kingdom—in the days of Jeroboam I and Nadab—was the old center of Shechem. This was probably the memory of the Israelites when the Books of Kings were put into writing. Comparison of the nature of Shechem in the early Iron IIA to that in the Late Bronze Age could be very instructive; however, the finds for the former period have not yet been published.

The Bible recounts that with the rise of a new dynasty in the days of Baasha the capital moved from Shechem to Tirzah. Tirzah continued to serve as the capital until the early days of Omri and was then replaced by Samaria. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of the biblical memory on Tirzah having been the capital of the Northern Kingdom before Samaria. It was not a major town in the later days of the kingdom and hence was of no concern for the later authors.

Tirzah must have been chosen by Baasha in order to distance himself from the traditional power-center of Shechem. Its location is ideal: in the center of the northern part of the central highlands; on rich springs; and on the main road leading to the Jordan Valley and the area of the Jabbok. The western Gilead (Mahanaim, Pnuel, Jabesh-gilead) was probably included in the territory of the Northern Kingdom from its outset, as it must have been inherited from the Saulide chiefdom. There is no evidence of Israelite rule in the plateau of the Gilead before the Omrides (below).

Tell el-Farah North, the location of Tirzah, was deserted in the early and middle Iron I.\textsuperscript{33} This is clear from the absence of popular pottery types such as cooking pots with erect and everted rims, collared rim jars and the “Manassite

\textsuperscript{31} Sharon et al., “Report on the First Stage”; Finkelstein and Piasetzky, ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Finkelstein and Piasetzky, “Radiocarbon Dating the Iron Age in the Levant”.

\textsuperscript{33} For phases in the Iron I, see I. Finkelstein and E. Piasetzky, “The Iron I-IIA in the Highlands and beyond: \textsuperscript{14}C Anchors, Pottery Phases and the Shoshenq I Campaign”, \textit{Levant 38} (2006), pp. 45-61.
bowl”. The first Iron Age layer at Tirzah is Stratum VIIa, unearthed mainly in the north of Chantier II of de-Vaux’s excavations, located in the western sector of the mound. It features a rural, unfortified settlement the size of which is difficult to estimate. The area excavated did not reveal any sign of public architecture. The pottery of this stratum characterizes the late Iron I (Megiddo VIA horizon) and the early phase of the Iron IIA. In the Jezreel Valley, too, the early Iron IIA features rural, unfortified settlements, as are evident at Megiddo (Stratum VB), Yokneam (XVI-XV) and Jezreel (the pre-enclosure settlement).

The early days of Samaria demonstrate the first change: on the one hand, a monumental palace was constructed in a building effort that included the shaping of the summit of the rocky hill. On the other hand, in its early days the palace was apparently surrounded by agricultural installations and served as a rural estate. The construction of a monumental royal compound with casemate fortification, elevated on large-scale fills, came in a somewhat later phase of the Omride dynasty.

This means that in pre-Samaria days the Northern Kingdom was ruled from a rural unfortified settlement at Tirzah. The kings of the North dominated a mainly rural landscape both in the highlands and the Jezreel Valley, with no evidence of monumental architecture, fortifications, or developed administrative centers. The first change came with the construction of the first palace at Samaria, probably by Omri. A full-scale urban transformation of the capital and the kingdom characterizes the more advanced phase of the Omride dynasty, probably in the days of Ahab.

Several years ago Nadav Na’aman and I compared the territorial expansion of the Northern Kingdom during the reign of the Omride kings to that of Shechem of the Amarna period. Yet, Shechem of the Amarna period better fits my current reconstruction of the territorial extent and nature of the Northern Kingdom before the Omrides. Both were ruled from a modest settlement

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34) For the latter see A. Zertal, “To the Land of the Perizzites and the Giants: On the Israelite Settlement in the Hill Country of Manasseh”, in I. Finkelstein and N. Na’aman (eds.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 51-52; it was especially popular in the area of Tell el-Farah.
36) Herzog and Singer-Avitz, “Sub-Dividing the Iron IIA”.
38) Finkelstein, “Omride Architecture”.
39) Finkelstein and Na’aman, “Shechem of the Amarna Period”.
with no evidence of monumental buildings. Similar to the Northern Kingdom in its early days, Amarna's Shechem ruled over the northern part of the central highlands, part of the Jordan Valley and possibly areas in the highlands to the east of the Jordan; its maneuvers, as recorded in the tablets, were aimed at expanding into the Jezreel Valley. Pre-Omride Israel ruled over similar areas in the highlands and east of the Jordan, and successfully expanded into the Jezreel Valley.

The nature of both Shechem of the Amarna period and Israel in the early Iron IIA can be described as an expanding, early territorial formation. Similar phenomena—of an emerging territorio-political entity ruled from a modest rural settlement in the highlands—are known in the later history of the Levant, for instance in the case of Dhar el-Omar in the Lower Galilee and Fakhr ed-Din in the mountains of Lebanon.

How Far North did the Omrides Rule?

The Elijah-Elisha cycle in Kings contains genuine material about the Northern Kingdom in the time of the Omride Dynasty that is told against the background of a relatively detailed geography. It focuses on the Jezreel Valley and its vicinity, with no mention of Israeliite sites further to the north. Sites mentioned are Jezreel, Shunem, Mt. Carmel, Megiddo, Beth-haggan (Jenin?) and Ibleam (located on the road connecting the Jezreel and Dothan Valleys). Places such as Hazor, Dan, Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah—or sites in the hilly Galilee referred to in the list of towns of Naphtali in Josh 19—are not mentioned. Regardless of the exact dates of the battles between Israel and Aram Damascus

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40) Ibid.
at Aphek and Ramoth-Gilead\footnote{E.g. M. J. Miller, “The Elisha Cycle and the Accounts of the Omride Wars”, \textit{JBL} 85 (1966), pp. 441-454; Lipiński, \textit{Aramaeans}, pp. 375, 378, 397-399.}—no battle took place in the Jordan Valley to the north of the Sea of Galilee or its surroundings. Therefore, from the perspective of the biblical text, there is no reason to assume that the Omrides expanded north of the Jezreel Valley and the Gilead. Yet, archaeology and the Tel Dan Stele draw a different picture.

A decade ago, I proposed identifying Omride architecture according to several characteristics, mainly a casemate fortification built on an elevated podium, supported by a glacis and surrounded by a moat, and six-chambered gates.\footnote{Finkelstein, “Omride Architecture”; for Omride architecture in Moab see I. Finkelstein and O. Lipschits, “Omride Architecture in Moab: Jahaz and Ataroth”, \textit{ZDPV} (in press).} I suggested that all or most of these characteristics, evident at Samaria and Jezreel, can be identified in Stratum X at Hazor, which dates to the 9th century BCE.\footnote{For the date see Finkelstein, “Hazor”; Sharon et al., “Report on the First Stage”; Finkelstein and Piasetzky, “Radiocarbon Dated Destruction Layers”.}

The Hazor casemate city-wall creates an irregular compound covering ca. 2.5 hectares; its layout was dictated by the topography of the Bronze Age acropolis. A six-chambered gate is located on the eastern side of the compound; its construction involved “enormous leveling operations” as well as a filling operation\footnote{For reservations regarding the moat see A. Ben-Tor, D. Ziegler and V. Avrutis, “An Archaeological Riddle at T el Hazor”, \textit{Eretz Israel} 29 (Ephraim Stern Volume, 2009), p. 69 (in Hebrew).} that raised the gate in relation to the area to its east. The situation to the east (outside) of the casemate wall is not clear. According to Yadin,\footnote{Yadin, \textit{Hazor}, p. 137-138; Y. Yadin, Y. Aharoni, R. Amiran, A. Ben-Tor, M. Dothan, T. Dothan, I. Dunayevsky, S. Geva and E. Stern, \textit{Hazor III-IV, Text} (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 30.} a “formidable” moat, estimated to be 10 m. deep and 45 m. wide, was dug there.\footnote{Yadin a.o., \textit{Hazor III-IV}, p. 53.} Most of the information regarding the inside of the compound of Stratum X comes from domestic activity. The only exception is Area B at the western tip of the mound. Though the citadel, which was built there in Stratum VIII, was not removed, sufficient evidence was found to indicate that a major building stood here in Stratum X, too.\footnote{Yadin, \textit{Hazor}, p. 140.} The size of the supposed Stratum X building can be estimated at ca. 20.5 × 30 m.\footnote{For reservations regarding the moat see A. Ben-Tor, D. Ziegler and V. Avrutis, “An Archaeological Riddle at T el Hazor”, \textit{Eretz Israel} 29 (Ephraim Stern Volume, 2009), p. 69 (in Hebrew).} The size of the building and its location on the edge of the mound, enjoying the western breeze, may indicate that it was a palace.
The similarity of the layout of Hazor X to Omride construction at Samaria and especially Jezreel is obvious. Still, one can argue that similar architectural elements were deployed by Israel’s neighbors, including Damascus. Aramaean affiliation of the inhabitants of Hazor X may be indicated by the fact that Hebrew replaced Aramaic in the (few) Hazor inscriptions only in the 8th century BCE. Yet, even if this is so (the data on Strata IX and VIII is limited to five fragmentary inscriptions), the language of the Hazor inhabitants does not necessarily indicate the identity of the ruling power there. More important, the architecture of Dan and Bethsaida—sites that can be labeled Aramaean in the 9th century BCE—does not display the typical Omride features (more below). I therefore see no alternative to the Omride identity of Hazor X.

Archaeology seems to provide a similar clue for the Upper Galilee. A casemate fortress protected by a strong glacis was uncovered in the 1970s at Har Adir. According to the excavators, the three phases at the site span a long period of time, from the late-11th to the 9th centuries BCE. Ilan described the fort as covering ca. 80 × 80 m., and related to the pottery from the fortress as contemporary with that of Hazor X. Ben-Ami reconstructed a contemporary fortress at the site of Tel Harashim, also located in the Upper Galilee, to the southwest of Har Adir. Who could have built a strong casemate fortress supported by a glacis at isolated and remote Har Adir in the 9th century BCE? The only possibility except for Israel of the Omrides is Tyre. Yet, from the long-term territorial history perspective, there can be no doubt that the Upper Galilee always belonged to territorial entities/administrative divisions to its south and southeast; while Tyre ruled only over the lower hilly areas to its east and southeast; the border between the two units is topographic (and geological). This was so in the Ottoman, Mamluk and Crusader periods, as well as in Roman-Byzantine times. In short, Tyre never ruled in the Upper Galilee and

53) B. Sass, The Alphabet at the Turn of the Millennium (Occasional Publications 44, Tel Aviv, 2005), pp. 85-86.
55) D. Ilan, Northeastern Israel in the Iron Age I: Cultural, Socioeconomic and Political Perspectives (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, 1999).
hence the only possibility for the construction of the Har Adir fortress is the Omride kingdom.58

We are left with the question of Omride expansion in the area of the Sea of Galilee. The site of En Gev on the eastern shore of the lake provides an important clue. A casemate fortress, measuring ca. 60 × 60 m., was erected there on a fill. It was apparently protected by a glacis. The fort dates to the late Iron IIA, that is, to the 9th century BCE.59 In this case, too, the question is, who built the fortress—a king of the Northern Kingdom or an Aramaean ruler? A possible answer comes from the comparison between En Gev and Bethsaida, located at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. The fortifications of Bethsaida are very similar to those of Tel Dan. Both are surrounded by a solid wall with offsets and insets and both are equipped with similar, exceptionally broad, four-chambered city-gates. Aramaean elements were found at both sites near the gate—a basalt column (and possibly the Dan Stele) at Tel Dan and a stele with a representation of the moon god at Bethsaida.60 The casemate wall on a fill at En Gev, on the other hand, resembles the architecture of Hazor X and Har Adir. It is reasonable therefore to affiliate En Gev with the Northern Kingdom.61

The biblical references to the battle of Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 8:28-29; 9:1, 4, 14) seems to depict a genuine memory of one devastating clash during the end-days of Joram in 842 BCE.62 This provides a clue for Omride rule in the plateau of the Gilead. An Omride stronghold at Ramoth-gilead, on the road from southern Transjordan to Damascus, is in line with their construction of two fortified compounds in the southern part of the mishor,

58) The coastal plain and low hills north of Acco were probably Phoenician, as is evident from the site of Horvat Rosh Zayit [Z. Gal, and Y. Alexandre, Horbat Rosh Zayit: An Iron Age Storage Fort and Village (IAA Reports 8, Jerusalem, 2000)].
61) The mention of Aphek in 1 Kings 20:26-30 as the battlefield between Israel and Aram depict post-Omride events that took place later, in the days of Joash (see, e.g., Lipiński, Aramaeans, p. 397).
62) E.g., Dion, Araméens, pp. 191-200; Lipiński, ibid., pp. 377-383.
north of the Arnon. The control of the King’s Highway could have served economic goals, such as domination over the flow of copper from Khirbet en-Nahas.

One can trace a pattern in the Omride construction program: casemate forts or administrative centers were built on the borders of the kingdom: Har Adir (and possibly Tel Harashim) facing Tyre; Hazor and En Gev facing the territory of Aram Damascus southwest of Damascus; Ramoth-gilead facing Aram Damascus in the Bashan; and Jahaz and Ataroth facing Moabite Dibon. Except for the capital, Samaria, only Jezreel seems to be located in the heartland of Israel. The Omride compound there could have been erected as a center of command in the traditionally Canaanite valley or as a military center related to the chariot force of the kingdom.

To sum up this point, in the north the Omrides expanded their territory far beyond the Jezreel Valley, into the Lower Galilee and the southern part of the Upper Galilee, into the area of the Sea of Galilee and into the Jordan Valley as far north as Hazor. They did not rule further to the north at Dan and its surroundings; as indicated by Arie, in the first half of the 9th century Dan was deserted.

In Lines 3-4 of the Tel Dan Stele the author—King Hazael of Damascus—states that “the king of I[s]rael entered previously in my father’s land”, probably meaning that before his days an Israelite king conquered territories that he (Hazael) conceived as legitimately belonging to Damascus. Who could be that king of Israel and where could these territories be? Reviewing the geopolitical situation before Hazael, the expansion of an Israelite king into Damascene territories could have occurred only during the period of the Omride dynasty, probably in the days of Ahab. The territories to which Hazael refers could have been the Jordan Valley north of the Sea of Galilee around Hazor, and even further to the north if one reconstructs the opening of the Dan Inscription (Line 2) as evidence that the King of Israel fought Hazael’s predecessor at Abel-beth-maacah.

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63) Finkelstein and Lipschits, “Omride Architecture in Moab”.
64) For peak period of production there in the first half of the 9th century, see I. Finkelstein and E. Piasetzky, “Radiocarbon and the History of Copper Production at Khirbet en-Nahas”, Tel Aviv 35 (2008), pp. 82-95.
65) D. Cantrell, The Horsemen of Israel (Winona Lake, in press).
66) “Reconstructing the Iron Age II Strata at Tel Dan”.
The Final Drive to the North: The Early 8th Century

In the second half of the 9th century, under Aramaean pressure, the Northern Kingdom shrank to its territories in the hill country around Samaria. This is evident from the biblical text, from the Tel Dan Stele and from a wave of late Iron IIA destruction layers identified at Israelite sites in the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys.68 Assyrian pressure on Damascus a few decades later, in the days of Adad-nirari III, brought about the recovery of Israel,69 including the beginning of the last and most meaningful expansion of the kingdom in the north.

The Second Book of Kings recounts that Joash “took again from Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken from Jehoahaz his father in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel” (2 Kings 13:25). It is not clear where these cities were located, but one could imagine that the author probably relates to the Jezreel Valley and/or to the Gilead. The text is more specific about the time of Jeroboam II: “He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath (Heb. Lebo Hamath) as far as the Sea of the Arabah...” (2 Kings 14:25). Though an expansion of Jeroboam in the Valley of Lebanon as far as Lebo-hamath in the Valley of Lebanon and the continuing reference that Jeroboam “recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath” cannot be taken as historical,70 Israelite territorial gains in the north are evident from other sources.

Control of Jeroboam II over the plateau of the Gilead appears to be indicated by two biblical sources: 1) Ramoth-gilead is mentioned as the headquarters of a Solomonic district (1 Kings 4:13); this list seems to depict early 8th century BCE Israelite administrative realities.71 2) Amos (6:13) hints at an Israelite take-over of Karnaim in the southern Bashan in the first half of the 8th century BCE.72

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p. 13; Schniedewind, “Tel Dan Stele”, p. 79; Na’aman, Ancient Israel’s History, p. 177. Needless to say, the name Abel-beth-maacah indicates an Aramaean town.

68 Na’aman, “Historical and Literary”; for the date of the destruction layers see Finkelstein and Piasetzky, “Radiocarbon Dated Destruction Layers”.


70 For Damascus and Hamath see Na’aman, Ancient Israel’s History, p. 231.

71 Naaman (ibid., pp. 102-119) relates it to the days of Assyrian rule.

72 Lipiński, ibid., p. 401.
Domination of the Northern Kingdom in the upper Jordan Valley is confirmed by the biblical description of Tiglath-pileser’s campaign in this territory (732 BCE): the Assyrian king is said to have conquered “Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali” (2 Kings 15:29). A town named Abel is mentioned in a Tiglath-pileser III Summary Inscription 4 from Nimrud as being located on the border of the Northern Kingdom (bit-Humria). Scholars had identified this toponym as Abel-beth-maacah, but based on George Smith’s original notebooks, Tadmor followed by Na’aman later read Abel-sitti=Abel-shittim. With no access to the original inscription, there can be no final verdict on this matter.

Archaeology shows that in the first half of the 8th century the Northern Kingdom reconquered Hazor and took over Dan. Hazor VI-V feature Israelite material culture and the same holds true for Dan III-II. The smashing of the moon god stele at Bethsaida may be interpreted against the background of a take over of the town by the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam II. This was the first time that the 9th century BCE Aramaean towns of Dan, Abel-beth-maacah (as indicated also by its name) and Bethsaida shifted hands to the Northern Kingdom. Inscriptions found in 8th century strata in the north are written in Hebrew; beyond political domination, this may testify to the expansion of Israelite population into Aramaean lands.

It is clear, then, that in the days of Jeroboam II Israel reached its maximal territorial range, and included the entire northern part of the Jordan Valley and possibly even beyond. The reference to a North Israelite cult at Dan (1 Kings 12:29) probably reflects this 8th century BCE reality. The same holds true for the biblical notion that the Land of Israel stretches “from Dan...
to Beer-sheba”—marking the two extreme administrative centers of the Hebrew kingdoms in the 8th century BCE—Israelite Dan in the north and Judahite Beer-sheba in the south.

**Acknowledgment**

This article was prepared with the help of the Chaim Katzman Archaeology Fund, Tel Aviv University.