TELL EL-FAR‘AH (TIRZAH)
AND THE EARLY DAYS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with Stratum VIIa at Tell el-Far‘ah (North), location of biblical Tirzah. This layer should be dated to the very late Iron I and the early phase of the Iron IIA, meaning that it covers the early days of the Northern Kingdom in the late 10th and early 9th centuries BCE. Stratum VIIa features a sparsely built, comparatively poor, unfortified settlement that seems to have expanded over a relatively small part of the mound – an area of ca. one hectare of the acropolis. This settlement served as the seat of the early kings of Israel, and thus much can be learned from it about the nature of the territorial kingdoms of the Levant in their formative stage. What we know about Tirzah reflects on other capitals in the region at that time—first and foremost Jerusalem.

Keywords: Tell el-Far‘ah (North), Tirzah, Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam I, early territorial kingdom, 10th century Jerusalem

SOMMAIRE

L’article traite du niveau VIIa de Tell el-Far‘ah (Nord), la Tirzah biblique. Ce niveau devrait être daté de l’extrême fin du Fer I et du tout début du Fer IIA, ce qui signifie qu’il recouvre les premiers jours du Royaume du Nord, à la fin du Xe et au début du IXe s. av. J.-C. Le niveau VIIa présente une occupation épars, pauvre et non fortifiée, qui semble n’avoir concerné qu’une partie relativement modeste du Tell, à savoir une surface d’environ un hectare sur l’acropole. Ce niveau, qui présente Tirzah du temps où elle servait de capitale aux premiers rois d’Israël, permet de comprendre la nature des royaumes territoriaux du Levant, à leur phase de formation. Ce que nous
savons de Tirzah reflète en effet l’état des autres capitales de l’époque, d’abord et avant tout Jérusalem.

Mots-clés: Tell el-Farah (Nord), Tirzah, Royaume du Nord, Jeroboam Ier, phase formative des royaumes territoriaux, Jérusalem du Xe siècle

The biblical town of Tirzah – the early capital of the Northern Kingdom, probably during the reign of its first seven kings – is safely identified at Tell el-Farah (North), northeast of Shechem. The mound is set in a fertile valley near two rich springs, at the head of Wadi Far’ah, which leads to the Jordan Valley.

The Bible lists Tirzah as one of the Canaanite cities conquered by Joshua (Josh 12:24) and refers to Tirzah as one of the daughters of Zelophehad (Nu 26:33, 27:1; Josh 17:3). The Book of Kings (12:25) says that Jeroboam I built Shechem, but also hints (14:17) that he later moved to Tirzah. 1 Kings specifically mentions Tirzah as the capital of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Baasha (15:21, 33; 16: 6), Elah (1 Kings 16:8-9), Zimri (1 Kings 16:15) and the first half of the reign of Omri (1 Kings 16:23). Assuming that Jeroboam ruled at least part of his reign from Tirzah and that his son Nadab, as well as Tibni, also ruled from there, Tirzah was the seat of the first seven kings of the northern kings, during a period of ca. 50 years in the late 10th and early 9th centuries BCE. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the consistent and deeply rooted information on Tirzah as the capital of Israel, which probably reached the author of Kings from northern sources and tradi-


Several scholars have suggested the possibility that biblical tbš (Thebez), mentioned in relation to the area of Shechem, is a copying error for trš (Tirzah, without the mater lectionis he – see, e.g., Y. ARONI, The Land of the Bible, A Historical Geography [Philadelphia, 1979] 265), perhaps due to the similarity of the resh and bet of the First Temple period. Accordingly one could theoretically look for the site of Tirzah near the village of Tubas, only ca. five km northeast of Tell el-Farah’. Yet, Tubas did not yield Iron Age finds and the main ancient site in its vicinity – Khirbet Eynun – produced only a small number of Iron II sherds (A. ZERTAL, The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: The Eastern Valleys and the Fringes of the Desert [Tel Aviv, 1996, Hebrew] 202-203 and 211-214 respectively). Incidentally, archaeology also dismisses the other pre-Albright identifications of Tirzah with Taisir (no Iron Age pottery – ibid, pp. 193-194) and Talluzeh (the ancient site is too small – idem, The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: The Shechem Syncline [Tel Aviv, 1992, Hebrew] 476-477).
Archaeology seems to support the biblical account that Samaria was built only in the days of the Omrides, and this provides additional support for the Tirzah tradition.

All this makes Tell el-Farah—the site of Tirzah—a crucial place for the study of the early days of the Northern Kingdom. In what follows I wish to examine the character of the site in the late 10th and early 9th centuries BCE and then draw anthropological and historical conclusions regarding the genesis of the kingdom of Israel. Moreover, since our knowledge of the archaeology of Tell el-Farah at that time is much more intensive than our knowledge of contemporary capital-sites such as Damascus, Jerusalem, Amman and even Dibon, the Tirzah case may shed light on the formative phase of other territorial kingdoms and their capitals in other regions of the Levant.

**THE SITE, ITS EXCAVATION AND STRATIGRAPHY**

Tell el-Farah was explored by Roland de Vaux between 1946 and 1960. De Vaux excavated four fields, three of them (Chantiers II, III and IV) on the western side of the mound and one (Chantier I) in the north. Five sections were dug on the northeastern slope, between Chantier I and Ein el-Farah. Admittedly, much of the site—especially its heart and eastern sector—have not been investigated. Still, the information from Tell el-Farah is significant: the mound spreads across ca. five hectares, of which 0.5 hectare was dug in Chantier II alone. This means that the total area excavated in the three western fields seems to make up ca. 15% of the mound—more than the relative proportion of the excavated fields in most biblical mounds.

De Vaux published a series of preliminary reports on the results of his dig in *Revue biblique*. He described continuous occupation from the 2

Especially that Tirzah does not play an important role in the rest of the Deuteronomistic History.


See ibid, p. 151.

For the periods discussed here see: R. de Vaux and A.M. Steve, “La première campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Farah, près Naplouse, rapport préliminaire”, *RB* 54 (1947) 394-433, 573-589; R. de Vaux and A.M. Steve, “La seconde campagne de
Table 1: The stratigraphy of Tell el-Far’ah – from de Vaux to the current article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niveau</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Revisions on the date of the Tell el-Far’ah layers</th>
<th>This article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Late Bronze</td>
<td>VIIa</td>
<td>12th -11th</td>
<td>Early Iron IIA, ca. 950-900</td>
<td>Late Iron I-early Iron IIA, second half of 10th and early 9th centuries BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Iron I</td>
<td>VIIb</td>
<td>(11th)-10th</td>
<td>Late Iron IIA, ca. 900-840/830</td>
<td>Late Iron IIA, ca. 870-second half of 9th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 840/830-800</td>
<td>ca. 840/820-770/760</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“unfinished building”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIIc</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early 9th</td>
<td>Iron IIB, ca. 800-720</td>
<td>Iron IIB, ca. 770/760-720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iron II</td>
<td>VIId</td>
<td>9th -8th</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>VIIe</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Not discussed</td>
<td>Not discussed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Late Bronze II through the Iron I to the Iron II, with Niveau 4 standing for the Late Bronze Age and Niveaux 3-1 covering the Iron Age.9 The final report of the Late Bronze finds has not been published to date. The final report of the Iron Age finds was published by Chambon10 many years after the conclusion of the dig. Chambon introduced a new stratigraphic system, with Period VI standing for the Late Bronze Age and Period VII with five phases standing for the Iron Age.11 A new, short

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9 Table in Chambon, Tell el-Far’ah I, p. 11; Table 1 below.
10 Tell el-Far’ah I.
11 ibid, pp. 11-12; Table 1 here.
evaluation of the stratigraphy and chronology of Tell el-Far‘ah in the Iron Age has recently been presented by Herzog and Singer-Avitz.\textsuperscript{12}

Below I wish to put the spotlight on Period VIIa. I have no interest here in details of architecture and specific finds. What I wish to establish is the settlement history of Tell el-Far‘ah and correlate it to the textual evidence about Tirzah.

**Excavation results**

The Late Bronze settlement of Tell el-Far‘ah is represented in the excavation of Chantier I\textsuperscript{13} and in tombs.\textsuperscript{14} The nature of the Late Bronze finds in Chantier II is not clear, but Chambon mentioned Late Bronze remains there, too.\textsuperscript{15} In any event, the remains are poor and not well-preserved.\textsuperscript{16} This is also reflected in the number of scarabs – only three dating to the Late Bronze compared to a large number of items which can be assigned to the Middle Bronze.\textsuperscript{17} The settlement seems to have been destroyed by fire,\textsuperscript{18} but the exact date of this destruction – whether in the Late Bronze II or in the Late Bronze III – is impossible to determine.\textsuperscript{19}

Contra both de Vaux and Chambon (Table 1), there is no evidence for an Iron Age I layer at Tell el-Far‘ah. Not a single sherd that can safely be attributed solely to this period, such as a collared rim jar or a cooking pot with triangular everted or erect rim, has been found at the site. This evidence is especially weighty in view of the large number of these items collected at Iron Age I sites in the highlands even in surface surveys.

Regarding the Iron Age occupation, I basically agree with the recent analysis of Herzog and Singer-Avitz.\textsuperscript{20} Period VIIa – the focus of this


\textsuperscript{13} de Vaux and Steve, “La première campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far‘ah”.

\textsuperscript{14} de Vaux, “La quatrième campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far‘ah”.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Tell el-Far‘ah I}, p. 50 and p. 19 respectively.

\textsuperscript{16} ibid, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{17} O. Keel, \textit{Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus PalastinalIsrael: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit} (Orbis biblicus et orientalis Series archaeologica 031; Freiburg, 2010) 2-27.

\textsuperscript{18} de Vaux, “Far‘ah, Tell el- (North)”; Chambon, \textit{Tell el-Far‘ah I}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{19} The scarabs do not help: one is dated by Keel to the 18th-19th Dynasties, the second to the 19th Dynasty and the third to the 19th-20th Dynasties (\textit{Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus PalastinalIsrael}, pp. 6, 16, 26; the first is dated by J.-B. Dumortier, “Les scarabées de Tell el-Far‘ah”, in P. Amiet, J. Briend, L. Courtois and J.-B. Dumortier, \textit{Tell el-Far‘ah: Histoire, glyptique et céramologie} [Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 14; Fribourg, 1996] 72 to the 19th-20th Dynasties).

\textsuperscript{20} “Sub-Dividing the Iron IIA in Northern Israel”, pp. 174-176, 185; Table 1 above.
Fig. 1: Pottery of Period VIIa at Tell el-Far’ah.
Fig. 1: Pottery of Period VIIa at Tell el-Far’ah (cont.).
article – “contains pottery with Iron I tradition and some Iron Age IIA affinities”.21 Only a limited number of vessels were published (Fig. 1); most of them can find their place in the Iron IIA. Forms such as the multi-handled krater,22 the decorated jug23 and handles with punctuations and incisions,24 are better placed in the Iron I.25 Yet, even in the northern valleys the type-strata of the late Iron I exhibit collared rim jars,26 which do not appear in Period VIIa at Tell el-Far`ah. As mentioned above, this is even more significant for a site in the highlands, where collared rim jars abound. The next layer at Tell el-Far`ah – Period VIIb – produced a rich assemblage of pottery that belongs to the late Iron IIA, Megiddo VA-IVB horizon.27 If one weighs all these considerations, Period VIIa at Tell el-Far`ah should be dated to the very end of the Iron I and the early Iron IIA.28

In terms of absolute chronology this means that Period VIIa was established sometime in the mid- or early second-half of the 10th century and lasted until the early 9th century.29 In other words, Period VIIa covered several decades that equal almost exactly the time when Tirzah functioned as the capital of the Northern Kingdom.

21 ibid, p. 176.
22 Chambon, *Tell el-Far`ah I*, Pl. 47: 5.
23 ibid, Pl. 48: 11.
24 ibid, Pl. 79.
26 For Stratum VIA at Megiddo see Arie, “The Iron Age I Pottery”, pp. 215-216.
Fig. 2: Plan of Tell el-"Far‘ah, emphasizing the restricted size of the Period VIIa settlement (based on Chambon 1984: Pl. 4).
The remains of Period VIIa were found in a restricted area, in the northwest of Chantier II. The negative evidence is no less significant:

1) The rest of Chantier II North was dug down to the Early Bronze layers; significant remains of Periods VIIb and VIId – the two more elaborate Iron Age layers at the site – were uncovered, but no remains of Period VIIa were found.

2) No less noteworthy, Chantier II South was excavated down to the Middle Bronze layers with no Period VIIa remains encountered.

3) In Chantier IV excavation reached the Middle Bronze, with no Peirod VIIa remains found.

4) In Chantier I, Peirod VIIb was found directly on top of Late Bronze remains.

Tell el-Far’ah features an elevated area of just over one hectare in its western sector, described by Albright as an acropolis “situated at the western end which is the highest and most easily defended part of the mound as well as the part which is nearest the spring”. It seems, therefore, that the Period VIIa settlement was restricted to this acropolis – in fact to the northwestern part of it – an area of less than one hectare (Fig. 2). Even if remains of this layer are uncovered in the future further to the east, it is clear that we are dealing with a relatively small, sparsely built settlement. The settlement was unfortified – buildings of this layer run over the ancient Bronze Age fortifications. At least some of the houses in the settlement are of the pillared type – a characteristic of Iron Age architecture in the highlands.

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31 Squares I/6-7 – de Vaux, “Les fouilles à Tell el-Far’ah, rapport préliminaire sur les 7e, 8e, 9e campagnes”, Pl. XXXIII-XXXIV.
32 Chambon, *Tell el-Far’ah I*, Pls. III, V.
34 Mallet, *ibid*.
35 Chambon, *ibid*, p. 50.
36 “The Site of Tirzah and the Topography of Western Manasseh”, p. 246; see also de Vaux and Steve, “La première campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far’ah”, p. 395.
37 Period VIIa resembles the Iron I-early Iron IIA settlement at et-Tell (“Ai”), which is limited to an area of ca. one hectare in the higher, western sector of the mound.
39 The most elaborate of these buildings (No. 430) is the one which was described by de Vaux (“Les fouilles à Tell el-Far’ah, près Naplouse, sixième campagne”, pp. 574-577) as a Late Bronze Temple.
The Period VIIb settlement, dating to the late Iron IIA, is denser than that of Period VIIa and better planned; yet, the development from one to the other was organic, with no evidence of destruction. Continuity is evident in most places, though some changes can be observed in other spots. An intermediate phase, titled VIIa1, was detected in one location, indeed indicating that the transition between the two settlements was peaceful and gradual.

Period VIIb seems to have ended in crisis. The rich assemblage of complete vessels probably implies destruction. The possible abandonment of the site in the end-phase of the Iron IIA seems to point in the same direction.

DISCUSSION

The two centers of Late Bronze city-states in the central highlands – Shechem and Jerusalem – do not feature rich Late Bronze finds. Therefore, caution is called for when drawing conclusions from the fact that the Late Bronze settlement at Tell el-Far‘ah was relatively poor and that it does not seem to represent a first-rank town. From the textual perspective, the Amarna letters do not mention a third city-state in the highlands, but there is no way to estimate how much the existing archive represents the original one and thus a complete picture of the territorial entities at that time. Still, I would venture to risk stating that Tell el-Far‘ah was no more than a village in the territory of Shechem. There is no point repeating here the well-known fact that the list in Josh 12, which mentions Tirzah, does not represent a Late Bronze reality.

The occupational gap in most of the Iron Age I is surprising, given the dense habitation in this part of the highlands and the fact that the mound is located on rich springs, in a fertile valley, in a strategic spot.

41 E.g., Buildings 490 in J/6 and 180 in K-L/5 – Chambon, Tell el-Far‘ah I, Pl. I.
42 Building 205 and 208 in J-K/5 – ibid.
43 Chambon, Tell el-Far‘ah I, p. 22.
44 de Vaux, “The Excavations at Tell el-Far‘ah and the Site of Ancient Tirzah”, p. 133; idem, “Tirzah”, p. 377; Chambon, “Far‘ah, Tell el- (North)”.
45 See picture in Chambon, Tell el-Far‘ah I, Pl. 40: g, indicating destruction by fire.
48 Zertal, “‘To the Land of the Perizzites and the Giants’”.
on the road leading east. I can see no environmental reason for this gap and thus the abandonment of Tell el-Far‘ah may have had to do with local traditions following the destruction of the Late Bronze settlement. The occupational gap at Tell el-Far‘ah = Tirzah during most of the Iron I may hint that the reality behind the genealogy of Manasseh (including the daughters of Zelophehad) cannot be sought before the days of Period VIIa. And since the geographical reality behind the list was already fully developed at the time of the Samaria ostraca in the first half of the 8th century BCE, it stands to reason that this tradition reflects the organization of the Northern Kingdom in the Iron IIA.

With the data at hand it is impossible to decide whether Jeroboam I established a new settlement at Tirzah after a two-century gap or if the site was resettled a short while before his time. In any event, at the time of Stratum VIIa – the early days of the Northern Kingdom in the late 10th and early 9th centuries BCE – Tirzah was a relatively small, sparsely built, unfortified settlement. It was probably picked-up as a “capital” in order to avoid the traditional center of Shechem with its old feuds and deeply-rooted Late Bronze-Iron I institutions, aristocracy and traditions. Tirzah must have been chosen because of the advantages of its immediate environment and its location on the main road to the Jordan Valley and the Israelite territories on the western slopes of the Gilead. There is no way to know if the unexcavated sector of the “acropolis” included a ruling compound with palace and temple. But the part of the “acropolis” that was investigated shows no sign of public architecture. Franklin proposed that the first Iron IIA phase at Samaria comprised no more than an agricultural estate. If one dates this phase to the days of Omri, then the nature of the capital of the Northern Kingdom changed only with the construction of the large ruling compound and possibly also the lower platform at Samaria somewhat later, in the main prosperity period of the Omride Dynasty.

50 de Vaux, “The Excavations at Tell el-Far‘ah and the Site of Ancient Tirzah”, p. 139; idem, “Tirzah”, p. 382. Albright (“The Site of Tirzah and the Topography of Western Manasseh”, p. 246) described Tell el-Far‘ah as “a much better site for the capital of Israel than was Samaria”.
51 Following the first seasons of excavations at Tell el- Far‘ah, de Vaux doubted the identification of the site with Tirzah because the ruins did not seem fit for the capital of Israel (de Vaux and Steve, “La seconde campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far‘ah”, p. 571; de Vaux, “La troisième campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far‘ah”, p. 430).
The character of the capital of Israel in its first half century probably speaks for the nature of the kingdom itself as a formative territorial entity. On one hand the “capital” exhibits no evidence of monumental architecture and was unfortified. On the other hand the relatively large number of late Iron I-early Iron IIA seals that originated from Stratum VIIa (which stands out especially on the background of paucity of such seals in the much richer and more vastly exposed Periods VIIb and VIId) may indicate the existence of a bureaucratic apparatus. It is noteworthy that this early territorial kingdom, which was ruled from a humble settlement, was strong enough to expand to the Jezreel Valley and its environs.\(^{54}\) In other words, there is no correlation between the modest nature of the seat of the kings and the ability of the kingdom to expand territorially.

The phenomenon of an expanding early territorial kingdom ruled from a rural, unfortified settlement in the highlands is known from different periods in the history of the Levant. To mention only the sedentary parts of the region, and to start with recent centuries, it resembles the 18\(^{th}\) century AD “capital” of Dahr el-Umar in the village of Deir Hana in the Lower Galilee\(^{55}\) and the ca. 1600 AD hub of Fakhr ed-Din in the village of Deir el-Qamar in the Chouf mountains of Lebanon.\(^{56}\)

Much earlier examples come from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. For the former one should note the case of Amurru of the Amarna period in the Mountain of Lebanon\(^{57}\) as well as the attempts of Shechem to take over territories in the lowlands in the days of Labayu and his sons.\(^{58}\) For the early days of the Iron Age, one should recall the Benjaminite\(^{59}\) (Saulide) entity that was centered in the area of Gibeon-Geba.\(^{60}\)

59. This name is used here in its geographical meaning – the plateau of Gibeon-Mizpah to the north of Jerusalem.
60. I. Finkelstein, “The Last Labayu: King Saul and the Expansion of the First North Israelite Territorial Entity”, in Y. Amit, E. Ben Zvi, I. Finkelstein and O. Lipschits
The relationship between the late Iron I-early Iron IIA formative territorial entity that had its hub at Tell el-Far‘ah/Tirzah and the somewhat contemporary early territorial formation that was centered in the plateau to the north of Jerusalem is not clear. The latter, which finds its expression in the memories of the House of Saul in 1 Samuel, probably ruled over vast territories in the northern hill country and Transjordan and possibly reached the margin of the Jezreel Valley. Hence a reasonable sequence of events in the northern highlands would first see the Benjaminite entity as ruling over the entire area, including the region of Shechem. The destruction of at least some of the late Iron I city-states in the Jezreel Valley took place in the early 10th century and should possibly be associated with the expansion of this entity. The Sheshonq I campaign in the second half of the 10th century changed the territorial arrangement in the highlands and beyond. The Egyptian pharaoh, threatened by the expansion of the Benjaminite highland polity into the lowlands, assaulted its centers around Gibeon and the Jabbok River and brought about its (gradual?) decline. It is possible that Tirzah is mentioned in the Sheshonq I list, yet, no other place in the northern sector of the hill country appears in it.

The decline of the Benjaminite entity as a result of the Egyptian assault could have opened the way for the rise of Jeroboam I and the Northern Kingdom with its center in the Shechem-Tirzah region. Jeroboam, who seems to have come from Zeredah – probably a small stronghold in the topographically isolated area to the northwest of present-day Ramallah, emerged as a typical highlands strongman. I Kings 11: 40


61 Finkelstein, “The Last Labayu”.


recounts the connection between Jeroboam I and Shishak king of Egypt. This story is more elaborate in the LXX version, which may have been based on an old pre-Deuteronomistic source “resembling the books of Judges and Samuel”. If – similar, for instance, to Saulide traditions in 1 Samuel and the ‘Book of Saviors’ in Judges – the memory of Jeroboam I’s Egyptian connection originated from old northern traditions that reached Judah after 720 BCE, then it may hint at the possibility that the emerging Northern Kingdom, with its founder Jeroboam I, replaced the Benjaminite entity as a result of an Egyptian intervention, if not initiative.

The nature of late Iron I-early Iron IIA Tirzah calls attention to the case of Jerusalem and Judah. In its formative days, the Northern Kingdom ruled over a larger, richer and much more densely settled territory than Judah; still, it was ruled from a modest, unfortified settlement seemingly with no monuments. The idea that Jerusalem of the 10th century featured monumental buildings contradicts the archaeological evidence and – as demonstrated above – goes against what we know

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70 A group of towns in the Jezreel Valley are mentioned in the Sheshonq I list and a stele of his was erected at Megiddo. Whether the pharaoh campaigned in the valley when it had already been ruled by the Northern Kingdom, or whether Sheshonq I handed the valley over to Israel following the campaign (as suggested by my student Ido Koch), is impossible to say.


72 I. Finkelstein, Z. Herzog, L. Singer-Avitz and D. Ussishkin, “Has the Palace of King David in Jerusalem been Found?”, Tel Aviv 34 (2007) 142-164; I. Finkelstein,
about formative kingdoms in the Levant in the Bronze and Iron Ages. The desperate attempts to prove the existence of monumental buildings, including fortifications, in Jerusalem in the early days of Judah stems solely from an uncritical reading of the biblical text.

Tirzah lost its importance in the early 9th century, when Omri moved the capital of the Northern Kingdom to Samaria, possibly because of his desire to establish a link with the coastal plain and the port of Dor. Tirzah features significant prosperity in the days of Stratum VIIb, with the growing wealth of the entire kingdom in the late Iron IIA. Ironically, this happened when the capital had already been transferred to Samaria. It seems that this phase in the history of the site ended with a destruction that was followed by a short abandonment. This may hint that the catastrophe that befell the Northern Kingdom under the assault of Hazael of Aram Damascus was not restricted to Transjordan and the Northern Valleys, but also reached the heartland of the kingdom in the hill country.

**Summary**

Period VIIa at Tell el-Far‘ah/Tirzah, which dates to the very late Iron I-early Iron IIA, represents the days when the site served as the seat of the kings of Israel. The modest, sparsely built and unfortified settlement covered an area of ca. one hectare in the acropolis of the mound. The nature of this early “capital” of the Northern Kingdom resembles other cases of formative territorial kingdoms in the Levant – in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, Hellenistic Period and recent centuries. This puts the case of 10th century Jerusalem in perspective: The desperate attempts to prove the existence of monumental buildings there go not only against the archaeological evidence; they also contradict the long-term perspective of the rise of early territorial kingdoms in the Levant.


De Vaux described the change from Tirzah to Samaria as follows: “This contrast corresponds to the change in political orientation which marks the reign of Omri” (“Tirzah”, p. 382).

Though it was not fortified (also Herzog and Singer-Avitz, “Sub-Dividing the Iron IIA in Northern Israel”, p.175, contra de Vaux and Steve, “La première campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Far’ah”, p. 405; Chambon, *Tell el-Far‘ah I*, pp. 26-28).